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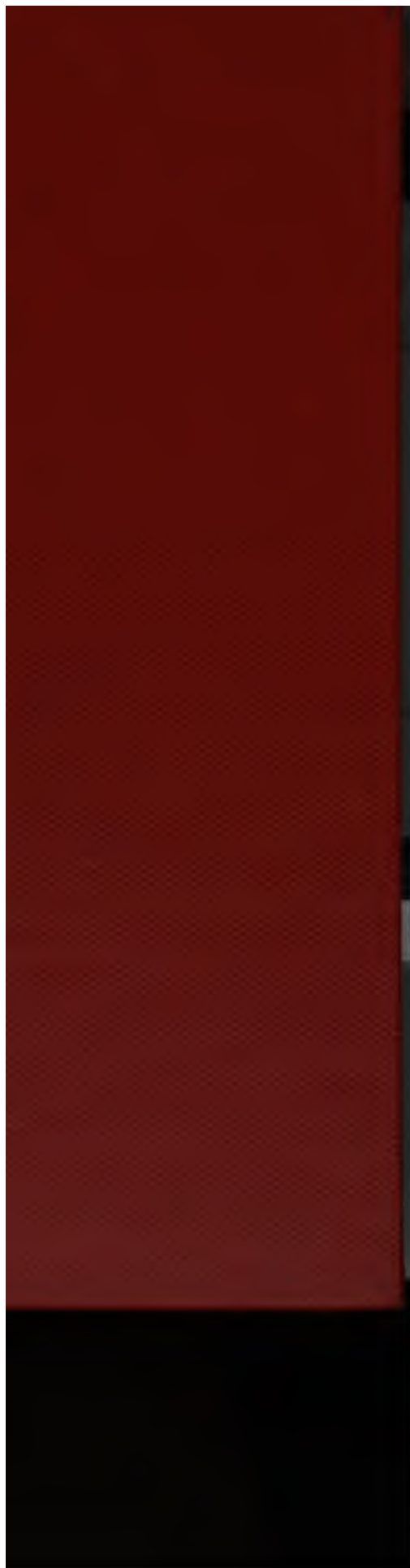
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**AMERICAN POETS  
AND  
THEIR THEOLOGY**



# AMERICAN POETS AND THEIR THEOLOGY

BY  
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CREATION," "MISCELLANIES," "CHAPEL-TALKS," AND  
"LECTURES ON THE BOOKS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT"

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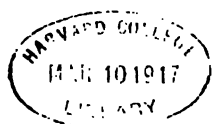
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## PREFACE

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SOME years ago I printed a volume entitled "The Great Poets and Their Theology." I gave account of Homer, Vergil, Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, Goethe, Wordsworth, Browning, and Tennyson. The volume had some currency, and I was asked by the publishers to prepare another book on "American Poets and Their Theology." After a little consideration I declined, upon the ground that American poets had no theology. Most of them being spokes of "The Hub," Harvard men, and Unitarians, I unwisely took it for granted that their theology was either nebulous or *nil*. When I demitted my office as president of a seminary and professor of theology, this old proposition recurred to me, and I considered the question anew. I concluded to make trial of Bryant, since he was the real founder of our poetic line. To my surprise and gratification I found that his poems contained a large amount of theology, and that of a very respectable sort—for he never wholly escaped the influence of his early Calvinistic training. This discovery emboldened me to go on to Emerson, in whom I encountered a teacher of a very different type, whom I was obliged severely to criticize. But when I came to Whittier, I was again encouraged; and I did not stop my work until Poe, Longfellow, Lowell, Holmes, Lanier, and Whitman had come under review. These poets represent various

phases of poetic art, and almost as many phases of theological belief. By turns I have praised and have condemned; but, as I trust, with constant effort to utter only truth.

It will be readily perceived that the standard by which these poets are tried is that of the evangelical faith; and by the evangelical faith I mean modified Calvinism, or the theology of the New Testament. I do not scruple to add that, to my mind, that theology is most fully presented to us in the writings of the apostles Paul and John. I regard these writings, however, as only the posthumous works of our Lord himself, and as the fulfilment of his promise that his Spirit should lead his followers into all the truth. So far as I know, our American poets have never been systematically subjected to this standard of judgment. There have been books in plenty which have estimated their work as simple poetry; but there have been none which have asked every poet to justify his theology by comparing it with divine revelation. The result has been that the charm of the poetry has often blinded the reader to its skeptical tendencies, even if it has not subtly undermined his religious faith. I have thought it a service to the church and to the truth to point out the shortcomings, if not the positively erroneous teachings, of some of our poets, while at the same time I drew attention to the correct and uplifting doctrine of others. I have conducted my investigation with a profound belief in the deity and the atonement of Jesus Christ, and I have tried, by applying his revealed standards, to anticipate his final judgment. How far I have succeeded, my readers will judge for themselves. I

shall be content to receive even their disapproving verdict, if I may only at the last hear the Master say, "Well done!"

An old-fashioned theologian will be pardoned for indulging in proof-texts. Mere description of a poet's views would fail to convince the reader of its justice, if it were not accompanied by definite quotations from the poet's writings. I have therefore furnished excerpts wherever this was possible. As in the case of proof-texts from Scripture, there is danger that the extract, in separation from its context, may give wrong impressions of its real meaning. I have tried to fortify my interpretations by references to each poet's "Life and Letters." Proof-texts, thus interpreted, express the substance of a document more clearly than the ordinary reader would gather it from the document as a whole. The ordinary reader, at least, will be grateful to me for saving his labor and time, while the critic will all the more enjoy his comparison of the quotations with the originals. With the single additional proviso that my aim is the limited one of exhibiting not so much the poetical as the theological merits and demerits of the writers whom I describe, I commit my work to the candid consideration of all who love truth in literature. It is my humble offering to Christ and to the world on my eightieth birthday.

AUGUSTUS HOPKINS STRONG.

ROCHESTER, August 3, 1916.

## NOTE

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The thanks of the author are especially due to Messrs. Houghton Mifflin Company, authorized publishers of the poems of Emerson, Whittier, Longfellow, Lowell, and Holmes, by permission of, and arrangement with, whom so many quotations have been made from these poems; to Messrs. D. Appleton & Co. for similar permission to quote from the poems of Bryant; to Messrs. Charles Scribner's Sons, in the case of Lanier; and to David McKay, the publisher of Whitman's "Leaves of Grass," for the same courtesy.

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I

WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT



# WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT

## I

THERE are patriotic people who maintain that America is the predestined home of poetry. They point to little Greece, with her rocky cliffs and bosky vales, her purple hills and encircling isles, and ask triumphantly if Greece was not the natural habitat of liberty and beauty. When we assent, they argue *a fortiori* that our great continent was even more manifestly ordained to nourish the largest and most precious growths of the human mind. Poetry is one of those largest and most precious growths, for it is the rhythmical expression of the world's meaning, in thoughts that breathe and words that burn. Poetry therefore must be native to America.

The argument would do credit to Henry Thomas Buckle, who attributes civilization wholly to environment. But it is not convincing. Unfortunately, perhaps, poetry needs for its production something more than bigness of territory or sublimity of scenery. Switzerland has giant and snow-crowned peaks, but she has never had a great poet. Our own mountain ranges and untrodden forests, our prairie cyclones and river floods, furnish proper surroundings, but they do not furnish the needed inspiration. Our struggles with Indian ferocity and British tyranny, our combi-

nation of civil freedom with civil union, give us subjects for poetry, but not the genius to treat them. A nation of Gradgrinds would still value Niagara only for its water-power, and would be entirely content with prose.

As a matter of fact, poetry was a belated product of the American soil. We may possibly explain this by remembering that

The Pilgrim bands, who passed the sea to keep  
Their Sabbaths in the eye of God alone,  
In his wide temple of the wilderness<sup>1</sup>

were Puritans of the most straitest sect, many of whom thought love for nature a dangerous rival to love for God. The clearing of forests and the fear of savage aggression, moreover, occupied their thoughts. The Bay Psalm Book was the nearest approach to poetical expression, and that was wholly religious. Grotesque and unmelodious as it was, it witnessed that the instinct of poetry still survived, and that men cannot long live without some such exercise of the imagination. Most wonderful it is that, after such bare and unpromising beginnings, there should have suddenly appeared the true father of American literature, the first real poet of our Western world. We wonder when we see the sun of Homer rising upon the darkness of Hellenic times; we may quite as justly wonder when we find the bizarre and tasteless lines of Trumbull and Barlow succeeded by the mature and lofty verse of William Cullen Bryant.

Yet even this prodigy was rooted in the past.

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<sup>1</sup> Bryant, "The Burial-place."



Though the poetic afflatus was an original and divine endowment, heredity and environment prepared the way for its expression. The poet came of a sturdy New England stock. His father and his father's father were physicians. His mother was a woman of energy and piety, who taught her son to love and to repeat the hymns of Isaac Watts. She hated drunkenness and lying. The father was a born naturalist. He taught his son botany and woodcraft, as well as love for good literature. For the time in which he lived, Doctor Bryant was a man of large and liberal mind. He was for several sessions member of the lower house of the Massachusetts Legislature, and once at least he was a member of the Senate. His visits to Boston and his acquaintance with public men made him the oracle of his town, though his serene nature prevented any pretense of superiority. He was careful of his dress, and was sometimes taken for a city resident, spending his holiday in the country. His physical strength was such that, though not of great stature, he could put his barrel of cider over the wheel into the wagon. Since his own father was a physician, his ambition was to have a son who should be a physician also, and with that hope he named his second son William Cullen, after the then celebrated physician of Edinburgh.

The boy was evidently well endowed in body. His only defect in childhood seems to have been a bigness of head, which the father sought to reduce, by plunging him each morning into a spring of cold water. He was born at Cummington, a little hamlet hid away among the Berkshire hills of Western Massachusetts.

The first pioneer had built his cabin there only thirty years before, and it was in a log house that William first saw the light. That log house has long since vanished from the scene, but the tradition of it still remains, in spite of the commodious mansion which after a time took its place and became the poet's country resort.

Robert Burns was born in a hovel, but Scottish minstrelsy preceded him. William Cullen Bryant owed more than Burns to his early education. His first schoolhouse was built of logs, but pedagogy in those days meant severe discipline, and the three R's were ground into the very fiber of his being. He was industrious and meditative. His natural habit of seclusion was fostered by the presence and influence, in the family, of his mother's father, Ebenezer Snell, an awe-inspiring patriarch, who frowned on all frivolity in the children. Grandfather Snell was a magistrate, under whose administration Bryant remembered seeing forty lashes inflicted upon a young fellow of eighteen for theft. A bundle of birchen twigs hung beside the chimney of the old log house, as an indispensable part of the kitchen furniture, and as a warning to evil-doers; and such rods boys often had to gather for their own castigation. But there were also books. Bryant traced back his poetical gift to his great-grandfather, Doctor Howard, who had opportunely left a large part of his library to his descendants. The boy devoured "The Pilgrim's Progress" and "Robinson Crusoe." Pope, Gray, and Goldsmith were his father's possessions, and these served to mitigate the influence of Anne Bradstreet and other New England poetasters.

We must not forget the educational influence of the times. Though Bryant was born in 1794, when the war of the Revolution was over, the survivors of that war were still in evidence, and stories of the Boston Tea-party and of Bunker Hill, of Saratoga and Valley Forge, were the chief entertainments of the fireside. There was no theater or circus, but the militia-muster, the husking-bee, the apple-paring, the barn-raising, and the maple-sugar camp furnished healthful excitement to the young folk of the community. The love of country flourished side by side with the love of nature. The pulpit of that day dealt only with great themes. Heaven and hell were realities that gave light and shade to daily life. Men's thoughts of the outward world and of civil government were interpenetrated by their thoughts of God and of immortality. The poetry of that age must needs be a serious poetry. But the material was there. The beauty and grandeur of nature, patriotic pride and boundless hope for the country's future, gratitude to God for freedom and faith in God's guidance of the individual and of the State—what nobler sources of poetic inspiration were ever found in any land?

Bryant was a natural linguist. At sixteen months, he knew all the letters of the alphabet. At the age of fourteen he began Latin with his uncle, Rev. Dr. Thomas Snell, of Brookfield, and in eighteen months he had read enough Latin to fit him for admission to college at an advanced standing. At fifteen he began Greek with Rev. Moses Hallock, of Plainfield, and in two months he had read through the whole Greek Testament. This finished his preparatory studies, and

at sixteen years of age he entered the sophomore class of Williams College. But shyness of nature and straitness of finance limited his stay to seven months. He left college indeed with the hope of finishing his course at Yale. This his father's means did not permit. He contented himself with a year of the classics and the mathematics with his father at home. It was no bad substitute for college training, and Williams College shortly afterward gave him his degree. To the end of his days Bryant recognized his indebtedness to his father. The father must have perceived his son's bent toward literature, for we read of no more effort to make him a physician. Doctor Bryant was himself inclined to the making of verses, and classical study had taught him correctness and compression. These qualities of style the father communicated to the son. In after years the poet, mourning his father's death, wrote touchingly:

For he is in his grave who taught my youth  
The art of verse, and in the bud of life  
Offered me to the Muses.<sup>2</sup>

That year at home, under parental tutelage, with freedom to roam the woods and meditate upon their lessons, was a great year for Bryant, for it witnessed the dawn of his poetical ambition. His mind and heart were awakening, and he himself tells us:

I cannot forget with what fervid devotion  
I worshiped the visions of verse and of fame;  
Each gaze at the glories of earth, sky, and ocean,  
To my kindled emotions, was wind over flame.

. . . . .

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<sup>2</sup> "Hymn to Death."

Till I felt the dark power o'er my reveries stealing,  
From the gloom of the thicket that over me hung,  
And the thoughts that awoke, in that rapture of feeling,  
Were formed into verse as they rose to my tongue.\*

In his later years he gives his matured conception of his calling in the verses entitled "The Poet," and shows us that poetic inspiration does not exclude careful elaboration:

Deem not the framing of a deathless lay  
The pastime of a drowsy summer day.

And in the poem named "A Lifetime," he dutifully connects the growth of his own mind with the teaching of his father:

He murmurs his own rude verses  
As he roams the woods alone;  
And again I gaze with wonder,  
His eyes are so like my own.

I see him next in his chamber,  
Where he sits him down to write  
The rhymes he framed in his ramble,  
And he cons them with delight.

A kindly figure enters,  
A man of middle age,  
And points to a line just written,  
And 'tis blotted from the page.

Bryant's earliest productions, however, were only "songs of the mocking-bird," and showed no signs of originality. All the more wonderful it is, that in his eighteenth year he was the author of "Thanatopsis,"

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\* "I Cannot Forget."

a poem so elevated in thought and so faultless in diction as to give it rank with the world's best literature. "Thanatopsis" was at first a fragment, and its beginnings go back to the poet's sixteenth year. Up to that time he had written only school-exercises, some of which he had recited to little audiences in the school-house; besides these there was one college poem, which is of no great account and was apparently gotten up to order. But his days of schooling were now over. He could no longer be dependent upon his father; he must shift for himself. His bent to poetry did not prevent him from perceiving that literature would never furnish him with a living; penury has indeed been well defined as the wages of the pen. He began the study of the law at Worthington and at Bridgewater, and at the age of twenty-one was admitted to the bar at Plymouth. But before leaving home to begin these studies, and at the age of eighteen, he completed "Thanatopsis," laid it aside, and apparently forgot it. In his absence, Doctor Bryant rummaged over the contents of a drawer and drew forth the precious document. After reading it hastily, he gave it to a lady friend, and asked her to pass upon its merits. She read it, and burst into tears, and in her weeping the doctor soon joined. They were tears of joy, for they saluted the rise above the horizon of our first poet, one of God's greatest gifts to the New World.

Dana, the editor of the "North American Review," thought it could not have been written by an American. The wonder of it was that a youth in his teens could have produced a poem so free from foreign influence, yet so faultless and sublime. Stoddard has called it

“ the greatest poem ever written by so young a man.” President Mark Hopkins said that Bryant “ had the wisdom of age in his youth, and the fire of youth in his age.” I have spoken of “ Thanatopsis ” as “ so free from foreign influences.” But I cannot wholly agree with George William Curtis, when he pronounces it “ without a trace of the English masters of the hour.” Chadwick is more nearly correct, when he says that Henry Kirke White’s “ Ode to the Rosemary,” Bishop Porteus’s “ Death,” and Blair’s “ Grave ” all helped to shape the mood out of which “ Thanatopsis ” came. To my mind it owes yet more to the example and inspiration of Wordsworth, who began to print before Bryant was born. We know that Judge Howe, at Worthington, found Wordsworth in Bryant’s hand, and warned him that it would spoil his style. But, thanks to his own native gift, Bryant had his own style, and Wordsworth only stimulated and encouraged it.

“ Thanatopsis ” is a poet’s vision of death. The solemn aspects of death are in mind, but they are not funereal. The coming of the inevitable day is nothing dreaded. It is the appointed end of earthly life, and its lesson is expressed in the closing lines of the poem :

So live, that when thy summons comes to join  
The innumerable caravan, which moves  
To that mysterious realm, where each shall take  
His chamber in the silent halls of death,  
Thou go not, like the quarry-slave at night,  
Scourged to his dungeon; but, sustained and soothed  
By an unfaltering trust, approach thy grave,  
Like one who wraps the drapery of his couch  
About him, and lies down to pleasant dreams.

Early maturity is often the precursor of early decay. But this was not the case with Bryant. His genius was a perennial plant, and he bore fruit even in old age. In his eightieth year he wrote his "Ode on the Birthday of George Washington," of which John Bigelow said that these were "the finest verses ever produced by one so young and yet so old." In some editions this ode is entitled "The Twenty-second of February." As it is brief, I quote it entire:

Pale is the February sky,  
And brief the midday's sunny hours;  
The wind-swept forest seems to sigh  
For the sweet time of leaves and flowers.

Yet has no month a prouder day,  
Not even when the summer broods  
O'er meadows in their fresh array,  
Or autumn tints the glowing woods.

For this chill season now again  
Brings, in its annual round, the morn  
When, greatest of the sons of men,  
Our glorious Washington was born.

Lo, where, beneath an icy shield,  
Calmly the mighty Hudson flows!  
By snow-clad fell and frozen field,  
Broadening, the lordly river goes.

The wildest storm that sweeps through space,  
And rends the oak with sudden force,  
Can raise no ripple on his face,  
Or slacken his majestic course.

Thus, 'mid the wreck of thrones, shall live  
Unmarred, undimmed, our hero's fame,  
And years succeeding years shall give  
Increase of honors to his name.



This poem, written just before Bryant died, suggests to us the wide stretch of his poetical activity, and its remarkable influence upon American literature. That influence covered a period of fifty-six years. Bryant's youth was the time of Napoleon's conquests, and of his final defeat at Waterloo. He lived through the reigns of Louis Philippe and of Napoleon the Third; through our war of 1812 and our great Civil War; and through the administrations of twelve of our American presidents. He celebrated Lincoln's Proclamation of Emancipation, and he expressed in pathetic verse the sorrow of the nation at Lincoln's death. His poetry never changed its sober and thoughtful air. The lyric and the impassioned were foreign to him. But interpretations of natural beauty were never lacking. He had not the melody of Shelley, nor the introspection of Browning, but there were a simplicity and a judicial quality about his verse which made it impressive and convincing. X

Bryant's youth was past before there occurred the so-called Elizabethan revival. Chaucer and Shakespeare did not get their proper hold upon him. If he had models at all, he found them in Cowper and Wordsworth. So we do not find in him the vast vocabulary and deep acquaintance with human passion that are so marked in Shakespeare, nor even Chaucer's gaiety and breadth of sympathy. The stateliness of Pope and the somberness of Wordsworth made their mark upon him. Yet he avoided the platitudinous sentiment of "The Excursion," and the artistic moralizing of the "Essay on Man." He was slow to print, and quick to detect doggerel. While his verse is never

brilliant or startling, it never lacks correctness, both in form and substance. Its sincerity commends it. We can never say of Bryant, as has been said of Wordsworth, that his fame would be greater if nine-tenths of his writing had been burned. It is this combination of beauty and truth, of insight into nature's meanings and simplicity in the expression of them, that has made Bryant the teacher and corypheus of our American poets.

My meaning will be more plain if I quote the words of Emerson and of Longfellow. These great writers had Bryant's verse before them at the very beginning of their literary careers. While Bryant was born in 1794, Emerson's birth was in 1803, and Longfellow's in 1807. Longfellow writes: "He was my master in verse—ten years my senior. His translations from the Spanish rival the originals in beauty." Emerson adds, "He has written some of the best poetry we have had in America." Yet Bryant did not devote himself wholly to poetry. The study of the law was followed by the practice of the law, and he could undoubtedly have succeeded in that profession. First at Plainfield, and then at Great Barrington, legal practice occupied him for nine whole years. During this period his reputation secured for him both readers and hearers. Harvard invited him to deliver its Phi Beta Kappa address, and he responded with his poem, "The Ages," a thoughtful review of the progress of human society, with stirring prophecy of the coming greatness of America. He writes:

Europe is given a prey to sterner fates  
And writhes in shackles. . .

But thou, my country, thou shalt never fall,  
Save with thy children—thy maternal care,  
Thy lavish love, thy blessings showered on all—  
These are thy fetters—seas and stormy air  
Are the wide barrier of thy borders, where,  
Among thy gallant sons who guard thee well,  
Thou laugh'st at enemies: who shall then declare  
The date of thy deep-founded strength, or tell  
How happy, in thy lap, the sons of men shall dwell!

But the law was not his chosen vocation. He became disgusted with the technicality and chicanery which often accompanied its practice. He saw himself

forced to drudge for the dregs of men,  
And scrawl strange words with the barbarous pen,  
And mingle among the jostling crowd,  
Where the sons of strife are subtle and loud.<sup>4</sup>

He longed for an opening into some form of literary activity. This was furnished him in the city of New York, where, after a year of work upon a purely literary and short-lived review, he became, first, associate editor, and then chief editor and owner, of "The Evening Post."

The change from country to city was a momentous one. Yet the New York of 1825 was not the New York of to-day. It numbered only 180,000 inhabitants, and the city extended no farther north than Fourth Street. Bryant found much of country scenery within easy reach, for he tells us that he delighted to ramble along the wooded shores of the Hudson above Canal Street. The city, indeed, was solidly built only so far as Canal. City life was not yet differentiated from the

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<sup>4</sup> "Green River."

life of the country. Though the poet was a lawyer, with nine years' experience of litigation and of mingling with his kind, he was by nature a modest man, and he hated publicity. In Great Barrington he had held the positions of tithing-man, town clerk, and justice of the peace, with an aggregate compensation of five dollars a year for all the three. For obvious reasons he afterward declined public office. In the great city he gave himself strictly to his business as editor. For forty-six years he followed what he regarded as his peculiar calling. He did more than any other man to elevate the tone of American journalism. It greatly needed elevating, as Dickens and Trollope have shown us to our sorrow.

No one who has reached the age of seventy can remember without shame the personalities and vulgarities of the daily press of fifty years ago. Bryant dealt with principles rather than with persons. He was at first a Federalist, because he feared the Jeffersonian tendency to sectionalism and individualism. After a time he became an advocate of Free Trade, because he detested all restrictions upon commerce; indeed, he demonstrated his independence of judgment and the courage of his convictions by standing many years for Free Trade when in all the country he was its only advocate. The same general principle of liberty under law, that made him first a Federalist and then a Democrat, led him at last, when the slavery agitation began, to take sides with the Republican party, and with that party he continued to act through the remainder of his life. He was no doctrinaire, like Greeley, and he had not the sarcastic and bitter pen of Godkin, his

successor; but he was an almost ideal editor, for sound judgment and ability to guide public opinion.

We owe him a great debt. If we abhor yellow journalism, it is because he set for us the true standard. He did not cater to popular taste, but aimed to form that taste. Not simply news, but leadership; not mere reflection of the good and evil of the day, but inculcation of right views in politics, art, and conduct—these were his aims. He loved his work as editor, because it was so impersonal. He could teach men to weigh reasons, instead of being led by passion and prejudice. But he could not be hid. He became known as the first suggester of the present park system of New York, and his statue now very properly stands behind the new building of the Public Library, and facing the park which bears his name. He was the founder of the Century Club, and its president when he died. He was also the founder of the National Academy of Design. He was called upon for addresses in commemoration of Cole the painter, of Cooper the novelist, of Washington Irving, Samuel F. B. Morse, Shakespeare, Scott, Halleck, and last of all, Mazzini. Indeed, it was just after his address in honor of Mazzini that, on entering the house of a friend, "that good gray head that all men knew" fell backward and struck the stone pavement, so that fourteen days afterward Bryant expired.

It is calculated that his editorial writing, during the half-century of his connection with "The Evening Post," would fill a hundred octavo volumes of five hundred pages each. He wrote upon manifold subjects of politics, history, biography, travel, art; but always

with pellucid clearness and straightforwardness, and with a view to immediate effect. He went seven times to Europe, and made one stay of two years abroad. He was a scholar in several languages, and made translations from Greek, Latin, Italian, Spanish, and French poems. He recited Dante in Italian, to match Zachos's recitation of Greek. He engaged in no financial speculations, and he never sold his editorial influence to any man or to any party. But he was all the more recognized as the leader of the American press, and his business sagacity and success were so great that at his death he left to his family a fortune of half a million dollars.

We cannot understand this untiring energy without some knowledge of its physical conditions. Bryant had one of those calm natures to which work seems easy and inevitable. There were no idle hours. Industry was bred in the bone. He tells us that his regular practice was to rise at five in summer, and at half past five in winter; to spend the first hour of the day in gymnastic exercise; then to bathe; to breakfast mainly on cereals; to avoid tea and coffee altogether; to walk three miles each morning to his office, and to reach that office by eight o'clock. The afternoon journal necessitated early hours in its editor. When his editorial work was over, he walked home again. But he took no office cares with him. He lived two lives. When the life of the editor closed with the day, the life of the poet began. His house at Roslyn on Long Island was a rural retreat, with forty acres of lawns and trees and shrubs and flowers about it. But within was a library of several thousand books, the sifted and

garnered wisdom and product of the ages. Here he luxuriated, and received many a distinguished guest. And here he continued to write poetry, though the pruning-knife and the waste-basket made the final product small. Toward the close of his life it was only on great occasions that he spent a night in his city house. Public dinners always sought him, and he frequently attended them. He was not a vegetarian, though he ate little meat; he was not a total abstainer, but his taking of wine was very rare and very sparing. He never used tobacco, though he provided it for his friends. At the age of eighty, though "a million wrinkles carved his skin," his senses of sight and of hearing were as perfect as when he was a boy. He never wore spectacles, and he was never confined to his bed by illness. His only answer, as to the secret of this wonderful endurance, was the one word, "Moderation."

But he was more than an editor, and more than a poet; he was a man. The foundation of his indomitable character was his belief in God. He was not given to voluble expression of his feelings; he thought, not altogether wisely, as I think, that a gentleman should never talk of his religion or of his love-affairs. We have few glimpses of his inner life, except those which are furnished by his poems. His actions, however, speak louder than words. In his family, every Sunday morning, there was the reading of a chapter of the Bible and of prayers. He was, from his youth to his age, an invariable attendant upon the Sunday services of the church. In New England he worshiped with the Congregationalists, on Long Island with Presby-

terians, in the city of New York with Unitarians. But he never ventured to make a Christian profession until his later years. Mr. Curtis has told so beautifully the story of this epoch in his life, that I quote his words:

"The poem called 'The Life that Is,' dated at Castellamare, in May, 1858, commemorates the recovery of his wife from a serious illness. A little time before, in the month of April, after a long walk with his friend, the Reverend Mr. Waterston, of Boston, on the shore of the Bay of Naples, he spoke with softened heart of the new beauty that he felt in the old truth, and proposed to his friend to baptize him. With prayer and hymn and spiritual meditation, a little company of seven, says Mr. Waterston, in a large upper room, as in the Christian story, partook of the Communion, and with his good gray head bowed down, Bryant was baptized."

In the painted window which commemorates the ministry of Frederick W. Robertson in Brighton, England, there is a representation of Jesus at the age of twelve before the doctors in the temple, and with this inscription, "They were thinking about theology; he about religion." Bryant dealt with religion. He was no professed theologian. Yet every man has some theology, whether he be conscious of it or not. Some conceptions of truth lie at the basis of his moral action, and the more thoughtful and logical he is, the more clear and articulate will these conceptions be. A mind so vigorous and honest as Bryant's could not help expressing itself in forms of speech; and though he was shy of utterance with regard to the deepest things of the soul, his poetic nature could not be satisfied without putting into verse that which to him was most fundamental. Many of his poems, indeed, seem written by way of gradual approach to a Christian con-



fession, and to be glad and solemn avenues leading onward and upward to the holy of holies and to the dwelling-place of God.

## II

I regard Bryant as a more truly Christian poet than even Wordsworth. Both were poets of nature. But Wordsworth came near to identifying God with nature: Bryant never confounded the two. Wordsworth would never have found delight in mountain, field, and flood, if he had not recognized in them a Spirit which through them manifested itself to mortals. That Spirit, however, never seems to utter articulate sounds, or to take personal form. But to Bryant, God was never mere impersonal spirit. "It" and "which" were not applicable to Him. God was transcendent, even more than he was immanent. The finite was never merged in the infinite. Mortal awe never became pantheistic absorption. In all this we see the abiding influence of the poet's New England training, and the happy effect of those theological sermons to which he listened in his youth.

What theology we find in Bryant's poetry must then be gathered from occasional utterances of the overflowing heart, rather than from any set effort to declare dogmatic truth. When we do find such utterances, we may be sure that they will be clear indications of his inmost thought, and not diplomatic concessions to the spirit of the times. He believed, first of all, in a per-

sonal God, and a God of love. This faith delivered him from melancholy, and made him optimistic. In this respect he was a contrast to Matthew Arnold, to whom God was only "the power, not ourselves, that makes for righteousness." One of the most astounding announcements in all literature is Matthew Arnold's assertion that this is the teaching of the Hebrew Scriptures. Without a personal God, the forward-looking spirit of Israel would be inexplicable. It is easy to see the truth of Hutton's remark that Matthew Arnold embodies in his verse "the sweetness, the gravity, the strength, the beauty, and the languor of death." Bryant's verse has sweetness and gravity, but these are the sweetness and gravity of true life, derived from the divine source of life, and sustained thereby. The solemn joy of Bryant has its analogue, not in the nocturne of Chopin, but in the largo of Handel.

Our poet saw God in the beauty and grandeur of the world. Woods, waves, and sky were vocal with praise of their great Author. Bryant was not ignorant of science, but he wished to join science to faith. Some of his noblest poetry is the expression of spontaneous emotion in presence of God's sublime manifestations in nature. "A Forest Hymn" illustrates this characteristic of his verse:

The groves were God's first temples. Ere man learned  
To hew the shaft, and lay the architrave,  
And spread the roof above them—ere he framed  
The lofty vault, to gather and roll back  
The sound of anthems; in the darkling wood,  
Amidst the cool and silence, he knelt down,  
And offered to the Mightiest solemn thanks  
And supplication.

**"A Hymn of the Sea" gives us, in a similar manner, the poet's recognition of God's presence in "old ocean's gray and melancholy waste":**

The sea is mighty, but a mightier sways  
His restless billows. Thou, whose hands have scooped  
His boundless gulfs and built his shore, thy breath,  
That moved in the beginning o'er his face,  
Moves o'er it evermore.

So too, there is a "Song of the Stars," in which the heavenly spheres are called

**The boundless visible smile of Him  
To the veil of whose brow your lamps are dim.**

Over against God's creatorship and omnipresence, Bryant recognizes the sinfulness of humanity:

**When, from the genial cradle of our race,  
Went forth the tribes of men . . .  
. . . and there forgot  
The truth of heaven, and kneeled to gods that heard  
them not.<sup>3</sup>**

The world

Is full of guilt and misery, . .  
Enough of all its sorrows, crimes, and cares,  
To tire thee of it.<sup>9</sup>

Ha! how the murmur deepens! I perceive  
And tremble at its dreadful import. Earth  
Uplifts a general cry for guilt and wrong,  
And heaven is listening.<sup>7</sup>

**There seems to be confession of his personal sin:**

<sup>8</sup> "The Ages."

“Earth.”

● "Inscription for the Entrance to a Wood."

For me, the sordid cares in which I dwell  
 Shrink and consume my heart, as heat the scroll;  
 And wrath has left its scar—that fire of hell  
 Has left its frightful scar upon my soul.\*

“The West Wind” is a symbol of human inconsistency and ingratitude:

Ah! thou art like our wayward race;—  
 When not a shade of pain or ill  
 Dims the bright smile of Nature’s face,  
 Thou lov’st to sigh and murmur still.

He regrets his forgetfulness of the “Yellow Violet”:

So they, who climb to wealth, forget  
 The friends in darker fortunes tried;  
 I copied them—but I regret  
 That I should ape the ways of pride.

“The African Chief” depicts the cruelty of the savage:

Chained in the market-place he stood,  
 A man of giant frame.

But his appeals for mercy are in vain:

His heart was broken—crazed his brain:  
 At once his eye grew wild;  
 He struggled fiercely with his chain,  
 Whispered, and wept, and smiled;  
 Yet wore not long those fatal bands,  
 And once, at shut of day,  
 They drew him forth upon the sands,  
 The foul hyena’s prey.

Human sinfulness touches the divine compassion in Bryant’s verse. He sees in “The Fountain,” that

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\* “The Future Life.”

springs "from the red mould and slimy roots of earth,"  
the symbol of God's grace:

Thus doth God  
Bring, from the dark and foul, the pure and bright.

And in "The Ages" he asks:

Has nature, in her calm, majestic march,  
Faltered with age at last? . .

Look on this beautiful world, and read the truth  
In her fair page.

. . . Eternal Love doth keep,  
In his complacent arms, the earth, the air, the deep.  
Will then the merciful One, who stamped our race  
With his own image, . .  
. . . leave a work so fair all blighted and accursed?

Oh, no! a thousand cheerful omens give  
Hope of yet happier days, whose dawn is nigh.  
He who has tamed the elements, shall not live  
The slave of his own passions; he whose eye  
Unwinds the eternal dances of the sky,  
And in the abyss of brightness dares to span  
The sun's broad circle, rising yet more high,  
In God's magnificent works his will shall scan—  
And love and peace shall make their paradise with man.

The poet's sympathy with nature is connected with his Puritan belief in man's fall. The external world is beautiful, because unfallen. It shares with man the effects of sin; but, whenever we retreat from the regions which man's folly has despoiled, we may find something which reminds us of our lost paradise. From the wrath and injustice of man, the Puritans fled to the untrodden wilderness, and in its solitudes they

found a sanctuary. In the "Inscription for the Entrance to a Wood," we read:

The primal curse  
Fell, it is true, upon the unsinning earth,  
But not in vengeance. God hath yoked to guilt  
Her pale tormentor, misery.

And so all things work together for good, even though for the present they may seem to contradict the divine beneficence. Bryant's "Hymn to Death" makes even that grim messenger to be the protector of God's creatures:

Thus, from the first of time, hast thou been found  
On virtue's side; the wicked, but for thee,  
Had been too strong for the good; the great of earth  
Had crushed the weak forever.

The "Hymn of the Waldenses" declares the justice of God:

Hear, Father, hear thy faint afflicted flock  
Cry to thee, from the desert and the rock. . .

Thou, Lord, dost hold the thunder; the firm land  
Tosses in billows when it feels thy hand. . .

Yet, mighty God, yet shall thy frown look forth  
Unveiled, and terribly shall shake the earth.

But justice is mixed with love. He translates, from the Provençal of Bernard Rascas, the magnificent lines:

All things that are on earth shall wholly pass away,  
Except the love of God, which shall live and last for aye.  
The forms of men shall be as they had never been;  
The blasted groves shall lose their fresh and tender green;

. . . . .

And the great globe itself, so the holy writings tell,  
With the rolling firmament, where the starry armies dwell,  
Shall melt with fervent heat—they shall all pass away,  
Except the love of God, which shall live and last for aye.

And from Boethius, on "The Order of Nature":

Thou who wouldst read, with an undarkened eye,  
The laws by which the Thunderer bears sway,  
Look at the stars that keep, in yonder sky,  
Unbroken peace from Nature's earliest day.

Love binds the parts together, gladly still  
They court the kind restraint, nor would be free;  
Unless Love held them subject to the Will  
That gave them being, they would cease to be.

This love cares for the individual, as well as for the great whole over which it rules. The poet, in "The Crowded Street," cannot think any human soul forgotten:

Each, where his tasks or pleasures call,  
They pass, and heed each other not.  
There is who heeds, who holds them all,  
In his large care and boundless thought.

These struggling tides of life that seem  
In wayward, aimless course to tend,  
Are eddies of the mighty stream  
That rolls to an appointed end.

There was a vein of humor in Bryant, which seldom came to the surface, but which his associates sometimes discovered. He invites his pastor, Doctor Dewey, to come with Mrs. Dewey and visit him at his country-seat on Long Island:

The season wears an aspect glum and glummer,  
The icy north wind, an unwelcome comer,  
Frighting from garden walks each pretty hummer,

Whose murmuring music lulled the noons of summer,  
 Roars in the woods, with grummer voice and grummer,  
 And thunders in the forest like a drummer.  
 Dumb are the birds—they could not well be dumber;  
 The winter-cold, life's pitiless benumber,  
 Bursts water-pipes, and makes us call the plumber.  
 Now, by the fireside, toils the patient thumber  
 Of ancient books, and no less patient summer  
 Of long accounts, while toppers fill the rummer,  
 The maiden thinks what furs will best become her,  
 And on the stage-boards shouts the gibing mummer.  
 Shut in by storms, the dull piano-strummer  
 Murders old tunes. There's nothing wearisomer!

This rhyming would have done credit to Browning or Lowell. But Bryant's humor appeared more often in his editorial work than in his poetry. A witty opponent said that his articles always began with a stale joke, and ended with a fresh lie—an accusation which only shows how greatly the journalism of the day needed reformation.

No stanza of all Bryant's writing is better known or more often quoted than that from the poem entitled "The Battle-field":

Truth, crushed to earth, shall rise again;  
 Th' eternal years of God are hers;  
 But Error, wounded, writhes in pain,  
 And dies among his worshipers.

This verse has been criticized, as holding to some power of impersonal truth to conquer the world. In the light of our poet's other utterances, I must think this criticism unjust. Truth is personified only by poetic license. It has power only because it has God behind it, and because it is the very nature of God



himself. And so I must interpret those noble lines in "My Autumn Walk," in which Bryant exclaims:

Oh, for that better season,  
When the pride of the foe shall yield,  
And the hosts of God and Freedom  
March back from the well-won field!

The hosts of truth and freedom are only the agents and instruments of God.

This persistent theism characterizes his short and fanciful, as well as his longer and more serious productions. I know of no more beautiful celebration of divine Providence than that of Bryant's address "To a Waterfowl." It brings down God's care into the affairs of individual life:

Whither, midst falling dew,  
While glow the heavens with the last steps of day,  
Far, through their rosy depths, dost thou pursue  
Thy solitary way?

Vainly the fowler's eye  
Might mark thy distant flight to do thee wrong,  
As, darkly seen against the crimson sky,  
Thy figure floats along.

Seek'st thou the plashy brink  
Of weedy lake, or marge of river wide,  
Or where the rocking billows rise and sink  
On the chafed ocean-side?

There is a Power whose care  
Teaches thy way along that pathless coast—  
The desert and illimitable air—  
Lone wandering, but not lost.

All day thy wings have fanned,  
At that far height, the cold, thin atmosphere,  
Yet stoop not, weary, to the welcome land,  
Though the dark night is near.

And soon that toil shall end;  
Soon shalt thou find a summer home, and rest,  
And scream among thy fellows; reeds shall bend,  
Soon, o'er thy sheltered nest.

Thou'rt gone, the abyss of heaven  
Hath swallowed up thy form; yet, on my heart  
Deeply has sunk the lesson thou hast given,  
And shall not soon depart.

He who, from zone to zone,  
Guides through the boundless sky thy certain flight,  
In the long way that I must tread alone,  
Will lead my steps aright.

These lines were written in the poet's youth, when the world was all before him where to choose, and when competence and success were far away. They are as perfect in diction as they are in faith. Matthew Arnold agreed with Hartley Coleridge in pronouncing "The Waterfowl" the finest short poem in the English language. I discern the same pure and trustful spirit in his poem entitled "Blessed are they that Mourn." The Providence that gives us days of gladness does not forget us in our days of sorrow:

Oh, deem not they are blest alone  
Whose lives a peaceful tenor keep;  
The Power who pities man, hath shown  
A blessing for the eyes that weep.

The light of smiles shall fill again  
The lids that overflow with tears;  
And weary hours of woe and pain  
Are promises of happier years.

There is a day of sunny rest  
For every dark and troubled night:  
And grief may bide an evening guest,  
But joy shall come with early light.

And thou, who, o'er thy friend's low bier,  
Dost shed the bitter drops like rain,  
Hope that a brighter, happier sphere  
Will give him to thy arms again.

Nor let the good man's trust depart,  
Though life its common gifts deny,—  
Though with a pierced and bleeding heart,  
And spurned of men, he goes to die.

For God hath marked each sorrowing day,  
And numbered every secret tear,  
And heaven's long age of bliss shall pay  
For all his children suffer here.

William Cullen Bryant was a Christian. He declared his entire reliance on Christ for salvation. I do not know that his faith would have answered to the ordinary dogmatic standards, but it was certainly strong enough to lead him to confession and to baptism. He knew his own weakness and insufficiency, and he trusted in what God had done for him, and what God would do for him, in Jesus Christ. In his Phi Beta Kappa poem at Harvard, he showed

How vain,  
Instead of the pure heart and innocent hands,  
Are all the proud and pompous modes to gain  
The smile of Heaven.

It is not generally known that he wrote hymns for public worship, for not all of these are included in most editions of his works. But Symington, in his biography, quotes for us two stanzas of a hymn founded on the saying of Mary, the mother of Jesus, at the marriage in Cana of Galilee:

Whate'er he bids observe and do;  
Such be the law that we obey,  
And greater wonders men shall view  
Than that of Cana's bridal day.

The flinty heart with love shall beat,  
The chains shall fall from passion's slave,  
The proud shall sit at Jesus' feet  
And learn the truths that bless and save.

His published works do, however, furnish us with another hymn which bears the title, "Receive Thy Sight," and is a metrical version of the Gospel story:

When the blind suppliant in the way,  
By friendly hands to Jesus led,  
Prayed to behold the light of day,  
"Receive thy sight," the Saviour said.

At once he saw the pleasant rays  
That lit the glorious firmament;  
And, with firm step and words of praise,  
He followed where the Master went.

Look down in pity, Lord, we pray,  
On eyes oppressed with moral night,  
And touch the darkened lids and say  
The gracious words, "Receive thy sight."

Then, in clear daylight, shall we see  
Where walked the sinless Son of God;  
And, aided by new strength from Thee,  
Press onward in the path He trod.

There is a hymn to celebrate Christ's nativity:

As shadows cast by cloud and sun  
Flit o'er the summer grass,  
So, in thy sight, Almighty One!  
Earth's generations pass.

And while the years, an endless host,  
Come pressing swiftly on,  
The brightest names that earth can boast  
Just glisten, and are gone.

Yet doth the Star of Bethlehem shed  
A lustre pure and sweet;  
And still it leads, as once it led,  
To the Messiah's feet.

O Father, may that holy Star  
Grow every year more bright,  
And send its glorious beam afar  
To fill the world with light.

And a prayer for the regions of our own land that  
need the gospel:

Look from the sphere of endless day,  
Oh, God of mercy and of might!  
In pity look on those who stray,  
Benighted, in this land of light.

In peopled vale, in lonely glen,  
In crowded mart, by stream or sea,  
How many of the sons of men  
Hear not the message sent from thee.

Send forth thy heralds, Lord, to call  
The thoughtless young, the hardened old,  
A wandering flock, and bring them all  
To the Good Shepherd's peaceful fold.

Send them thy mighty word to speak  
Till faith shall dawn, and doubt depart,—  
To awe the bold, to stay the weak,  
And bind and heal the broken heart.

Then all these wastes, a dreary scene  
On which, with sorrowing eyes, we gaze,  
Shall grow with living waters green,  
And lift to heaven the voice of praise.

There is a hymn of pity for the intemperate, and a prayer for their rescue:

When doomed to death, the Apostle lay  
At night, in Herod's dungeon-cell,  
A light shone round him like the day,  
And from his limbs the fetters fell.

A messenger from God was there,  
To break his chain and bid him rise,  
And lo! the Saint, as free as air,  
Walked forth beneath the open skies.

Chains yet more strong and cruel bind  
The victims of that deadly thirst  
Which drowns the soul, and from the mind  
Blots the bright image stamped at first.

Oh, God of Love and Mercy, deign  
To look on those, with pitying eye,  
Who struggle with that fatal chain,  
And send them succor from on high!

Send down, in its resistless might,  
Thy gracious Spirit, we implore,  
And lead the captive forth to light,  
A rescued soul, a slave no more.

And even the dedication of a church draws out his prayerful sympathy and poetic feeling:

O thou whose own vast temple stands,  
Built over earth and sea,  
Accept the walls that human hands  
Have raised to worship thee.

Lord, from thine inmost glory send,  
Within these walls to bide,  
The peace that dwelleth without end  
Serenely by thy side.

May erring minds, that worship here,  
Be taught the better way;  
And they who mourn, and they who fear,  
Be strengthened as they pray.

May faith grow firm, and love grow warm,  
And pure devotion rise,  
While, round these hallowed walls, the storm  
Of earth-born passion dies.

I have yet to quote the most significant of Bryant's instinctly religious poems. It is entitled "He hath put all things under his feet," and this hymn declares the world-wide supremacy of Christ:

O North, with all thy vales of green!  
O South, with all thy palms!  
From peopled towns and fields between  
Uplift the voice of psalms;  
Raise, ancient East! the anthem high,  
And let the youthful West reply.

Lo! in the clouds of heaven appears  
God's well-belovèd Son;  
He brings a train of brighter years:  
His kingdom is begun;  
He comes a guilty world to bless  
With mercy, truth, and righteousness.

Oh, Father! haste the promised hour,  
When, at His feet, shall lie  
All rule, authority, and power  
Beneath the ample sky;  
When He shall reign from pole to pole,  
The Lord of every human soul;

When all shall heed the words He said  
Amid their daily cares,  
And, by the loving life He led,  
Shall seek to pattern theirs;  
And He, who conquered Death, shall win  
The nobler conquest over Sin.

This hymn does not declare Christ's absolute deity, nor does it indicate the poet's knowledge of that spiritual union with Christ which is the source of greatest joy to the believer. Joy has its root in sacrifice—Christ's sacrifice for us and our sacrifice to him. We seldom read of the Cross, in Bryant's poetry. Yet faith in the Cross is not wholly absent. In his poem, "Waiting by the Gate," he seems to make all final joy depend upon Christ's death:

And some approach the threshold whose looks are blank with  
fear,  
And some whose temples brighten with joy in drawing near,  
As if they saw dear faces, and caught the gracious eye  
Of Him, the Sinless Teacher, who came for us to die.

The infrequency of our poet's reference to Calvary, and to the Christian's union with the crucified One, is the reason why his work is so somber, so redolent of duty, so given to external nature. If he had penetrated more deeply into "the mystery of the gospel," which is "Christ in us," he would have had more of the Christian's "hope of glory." Yet Mr. John Bigelow writes of him: "Though habitually an attendant upon the ministrations of the Unitarian clergy when they were accessible, no one ever recognized more completely or more devoutly the divinity of Christ." Even here, "divinity" may not mean the same as "deity." But let us be thankful for what we find. His theism and his recognition of God's providence, his faith in God's love and revelation, have for their corollary an unwavering belief in immortality. This appears conspicuously in his love-songs, which were, almost without exception, addressed to his wife, with



whom he spent forty-five years of married life. Before their marriage he addressed her as "fairest of the rural maids," and under the pseudonym of "Genevieve" he made her the subject of one of his lightest and sweetest poems:

Soon as the glazed and gleaming snow  
Reflects the day-dawn cold and clear,  
The hunter of the West must go  
In depth of woods to seek the deer.

His rifle on his shoulder placed,  
His stores of death arranged with skill,  
His moccasins and snow-shoes laced—  
Why lingers he beside the hill?

Far, in the dim and doubtful light,  
Where woody slopes a valley leave,  
He sees what none but lover might,  
The dwelling of his Genevieve.

And oft he turns his truant eye,  
And pauses oft, and lingers near;  
But when he marks the reddening sky,  
He bounds away to hunt the deer.

When in 1858 Mrs. Bryant had recovered from a long and painful illness, the poet welcomed his wife in the verses which he named "The Life that Is," and of these I quote the first and the last:

Thou, who so long hast pressed the couch of pain,  
Oh welcome, welcome back to life's free breath—  
To life's free breath and day's sweet light again,  
From the chill shadows of the gate of death!

Now may we keep thee from the balmy air  
And radiant walks of heaven a little space,  
Where He, who went before thee to prepare  
For His meek followers, shall assign thy place.

But in 1866 death finally took his wife from him. It was an irremediable loss, for his reserved nature had found in her his only intimate friend. His poem, "A Lifetime," begins with a treatment of grief in the third person, but it ends most pathetically by attributing all the sorrow to himself. It is the last poem he composed, and it summarizes his own life:

And well I know that a brightness  
From his life has passed away,  
And a smile from the green earth's beauty,  
And a glory from the day.

But I behold, above him,  
In the far blue depths of air,  
Dim battlements shining faintly,  
And a throng of faces there;

See over crystal barrier  
The airy figures bend,  
Like those who are watching and waiting  
The coming of a friend.

And one there is among them,  
With a star upon her brow,  
In her life a lovely woman,  
A sinless seraph now.

I know the sweet calm features;  
The peerless smile I know;  
And I stretch my arms with transport  
From where I stand below.

And the quick tears drown my eyelids,  
But the airy figures fade,  
And the shining battlements darken  
And blend with the evening shade.

I am gazing into the twilight  
Where the dim-seen meadows lie,  
And the wind of night is swaying  
The trees with a heavy sigh.

He did not sorrow as those without hope, for he believed in Him who has brought life and immortality to light in his glorious gospel. He cannot think that the separation caused by death is lasting. In his poem, "The Future Life," he writes:

How shall I know thee in the sphere which keeps  
The disembodied spirits of the dead,  
When all of thee that time could wither sleeps  
And perishes among the dust we tread?

For I shall feel the sting of ceaseless pain,  
If there I meet thy gentle presence not;  
Nor hear the voice I love, nor read again  
In thy serenest eyes the tender thought.

. . . . .  
The love that lived through all the stormy past,  
And meekly with my harsher nature bore,  
And deeper grew, and tenderer to the last,  
Shall it expire with life, and be no more?

. . . . .  
Shalt thou not teach me, in that calmer home,  
The wisdom that I learned so ill in this—  
The wisdom which is love—till I become  
Thy fit companion in that land of bliss?

Indeed, he trusts that even now the separation is not complete:

May we not think that near us thou dost stand  
With loving ministrations? for we know  
Thy heart was never happy when thy hand  
Was forced its tasks of mercy to forego.

May'st thou not prompt with every coming day  
The generous aim and act, and gently win  
Our restless, wandering thoughts, to turn away  
From every treacherous path that ends in sin?

His poem, "The Death of the Flowers," has a moving pathos, from the fact that it commemorates the

loss of a beloved sister who died in her twenty-second year:

The melancholy days are come, the saddest of the year,  
Of wailing winds, and naked woods, and meadows brown and  
sere. . .

Where are the flowers, the fair young flowers, that lately  
sprang and stood,  
In brighter light and softer airs, a beauteous sisterhood?  
Alas, they all are in their graves! The gentle race of flowers  
Are lying in their lowly beds, with the fair and good of ours.

And then I think of one who in her youthful beauty died,  
The fair, meek blossom that grew up and faded by my side:  
In the cold, moist earth we laid her, when the forests cast  
the leaf,

And we wept that one so lovely should have a life so brief:  
Yet not unmeet it was that one, like that young friend of  
ours,  
So gentle and so beautiful, should perish with the flowers.

He calls one of his poems "The Past." He sees all  
of earth's treasures sooner or later swallowed up by  
time. But, personifying the past, he writes:

Thine for a space are they—  
Yet shalt thou yield thy treasures up at last;  
Thy gates shall yet give way,  
Thy bolts shall fall, inexorable Past!

All that of good and fair  
Has gone into thy womb from earliest time,  
Shall then come forth to wear  
The glory and the beauty of its prime.

They have not perished—no!  
Kind words, remembered voices once so sweet,  
Smiles, radiant long ago,  
And features, the great soul's apparent seat.

All shall come back; each tie  
Of pure affection shall be knit again;  
Alone shall Evil die,  
And Sorrow dwell a prisoner in thy reign.

And then shall I behold  
Him, by whose kind paternal side I sprung,  
And her, who, still and cold,  
Fills the next grave—the beautiful and young.

One of Bryant's noblest traits was his filial piety, the love for parents and for kindred, which many waters could not quench nor the floods drown, and which the lapse of time and the separation of death only intensified and exalted. He cannot view the glory of "June," without thinking of the friends who will visit his tomb:

These to their softened hearts should bear  
The thought of what has been,  
And speak of one who cannot share  
The gladness of the scene;  
Whose part, in all the pomp that fills  
The circuit of the summer hills,  
Is that his grave is green.

Rest, therefore, thou  
Whose early guidance trained my infant steps—  
Rest, in the bosom of God, till the brief sleep  
Of death is over, and a happier life  
Shall dawn to waken thine insensible dust.\*

In "The Indian Girl's Lament," the bereaved maiden comforts her soul with the thought that her lover will yet be hers:

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\* "Hymn to Death."

And thou dost wait and watch to meet  
My spirit sent to join the blessed,  
And, wondering what detains my feet  
From that bright land of rest,  
Dost seem, in every sound, to hear  
The rustling of my footsteps near.

"The Fringed Gentian" suggests to Bryant an old man's departure from this earthly life:

Thou waitest late and com'st alone,  
When woods are bare and birds are flown,  
And frosts and shortening days portend  
The aged year is near his end.

Then doth thy sweet and quiet eye  
Look through its fringes to the sky,  
Blue—blue—as if that sky let fall  
A flower from its cerulean wall.

I would that thus, when I shall see  
The hour of death draw near to me,  
Hope, blossoming within my heart,  
May look to heaven as I depart.

"The Old Man's Funeral" is a poem in which Bryant might seem to be describing his own end:

Why weep ye then for him, who, having won  
The bound of man's appointed years, at last,  
Life's blessings all enjoyed, life's labors done,  
Serenely to his final rest has passed;  
While the soft memory of his virtues, yet,  
Lingers like twilight hues, when the bright sun is set.

His youth was innocent; his riper age  
Marked with some act of goodness every day;  
And watched by eyes that loved him, calm and sage,  
Faded his late declining years away.  
Meekly he gave his being up, and went  
To share the holy rest that waits a life well spent.

"The Journey of Life" ends with a stanza of immortal hope:

And I, with faltering footsteps, journey on,  
Watching the stars that roll the hours away,  
Till the faint light that guides me now is gone,  
And, like another life, the glorious day  
Shall open o'er me from the empyreal height,  
With warmth, and certainty, and boundless light.

There is a "Paradise of Tears":

There every heart rejoins its kindred heart;  
There, in a long embrace that none may part,  
Fulfilment meets desire, and that fair shore  
Beholds its dwellers happy evermore.

"And I," he said, "shall sleep ere long;  
These fading gleams will soon be gone;  
Shall sleep to rise refreshed and strong  
In the bright day that yet will dawn."<sup>10</sup>

"The Flood of Years" will bring at length the consummation of all our hopes:

Old sorrows are forgotten now,  
Or but remembered to make sweet the hour  
That overpays them; wounded hearts that bled  
Or broke are healed forever. In the room  
Of this grief-shadowed present, there shall be  
A Present in whose reign no grief shall gnaw  
The heart, and never shall a tender tie  
Be broken; in whose reign the eternal Change,  
That waits on growth and action, shall proceed  
With everlasting Concord hand in hand.

It must be acknowledged that this earliest of our American poets had his limitations. He had not the

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<sup>10</sup> "The Two Travellers."

breadth of the great masters of his art. Science and philosophy did not interest him, as they interested Tennyson. The complexity of human nature is not depicted in his verse, as we find it depicted by Browning. A certain narrowness of range characterizes all his work. He is descriptive and meditative, but never lyric or dramatic. There is an ever-recurring remembrance of death and the grave. Critics have debated the question how a youth of seventeen could have chosen "Thanatopsis" for a subject. It is even more remarkable that the poetical writing of after years still dealt with this as its central theme. Dr. William C. Gannett, with his minute knowledge of literary history, has suggested an explanation both plausible and interesting. The first five years of Bryant's life were spent in a log house whose windows looked across the road upon the stone-walled village burying-ground. The child's earliest impressions of the world were connected with man's mortality. Puritan training traced this mortality to an original apostasy of the race from God, and to the penalty of a broken law. The thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts, and Bryant never outgrew the somberness of this early view of the universe.

Jean Paul has said that the melancholy of youth is the veil which a kind Providence throws over the faces of those who are to climb the dazzling Alpine heights of success and fame. But it surely belongs to manhood to look with unveiled face upon the realities of existence. The meagerness of Bryant's schooling prevented his emancipation. If he had gone to Yale, as he had hoped to do, association with his equals and



his superiors would have drawn him out of himself, and would have made him more a man of the world. He was naturally shy and seclusive. As an editor, he disliked to meet socially those whom he might be called upon to criticize. His impartiality was sometimes like that of the reviewer whose freedom from prejudice is due to the fact that he has not read the book he criticizes. Greater variety of association would have added to the number of the themes which kindled in him the poetic fire.

But I must add to all this my belief that Bryant's mournfulness was the result of an imperfect understanding of the Christian revelation. He was a Puritan poet, and Puritanism too often lacked the recognition of a present Christ. In "The Pilgrim's Progress," Christian expects to see his Saviour when he reaches the heavenly city, but he is destitute of his companionship on the journey thither. Though strong faith in a future life made Bryant serene, his serenity was too much like resignation—he needed more of joy in the present. Such joy would have enlarged the area of his poetic achievement, while at the same time it tempered the critical spirit of the editor.

But one thing must always be said of our poet: he was sincere and pure. There is no mawkish sentimentality in his verse, no pandering to the lower instincts of humanity, no expression of merely transient and conventional religious feeling. Lord Byron could write hymns in histrionic fashion, as a brilliant impersonator; of such hypocrisy Bryant was incapable. His limitations, therefore, are as instructive as his gifts. Like Wordsworth, he is a poet of nature. But, while

Wordsworth sees in nature the immanence of God, Bryant sees in nature God's transcendence rather, and so is the greater Puritan of the two. His reverence for God's work in nature is greater than his reverence for God's work in man. But he has certainly taught us that poetry is no mere *vers de société*, but rather an embodiment of the deepest thoughts of the human soul:

He let no empty gust  
Of passion find an utterance in his lay,  
A blast that whirls the dust  
Along the crowded street and dies away;  
But feelings of calm power and mighty sweep,  
Like currents journeying through the windless  
deep.<sup>11</sup>

In "The Library of Poetry and Song," the great octavo volume which he edited, and which contains fifteen hundred selections from four hundred authors, Bryant prefaced the collection with an Introduction of his own. No better summary of the history of English poetry has ever been written, and no more judicious choice of poems has ever been made. In his Introduction, the poet gives us in sober prose his theory of verse. He tells us that "only poems of moderate length, or else portions of the greater works, . . . produce the effect upon the mind and heart which make the charm of this kind of writing." He measured his own productions by this rule. Most of his poems are short, and the shortest are in general the best. Yet in his seventy-second year he undertook the Herculean task of putting Homer's Iliad into English verse,

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<sup>11</sup> "The Poet," paraphrased by John Bigelow.

and the success of this venture encouraged him to continue his work until he had accomplished the translation of the *Odyssey*. He gave five years to this task, and finished it in his seventy-seventh year. We cannot understand it, unless we remember that it was his means of occupation and diversion after the death of his wife. It was not the toil and strain of original composition. Homer furnished the thought; Bryant had only to give the thought new expression. Homer led him out again into the open air. There was a likeness between Bryant's view of nature and that of the first great classic poet. The stateliness and resonance of Homer's verse appealed to him. Embodying that verse in English seemed to him a service to literature. And critics have agreed that no English version of the *Iliad* or of the *Odyssey*, in metrical form, surpasses it in value. To my mind, this five years' work of the old man eloquent, accomplished in the darkness of bereavement, and with the single light of an undying hope, shows a strength of will which even death was powerless to subdue.

One of our best American critics, Professor William C. Wilkinson, has compared Bryant's lack of tropical fervor to the statuesque repose of Greek art, and to the calm dignity of George Washington. There is emotion in his verse, but it is emotion that warms, while it does not burn. Passion is controlled, rather than deficient. The expression is less, not greater, than the feeling. There is no violence of diction. We have had but one Washington, and but one Bryant. It is well that our line of poets begins with one so high, severe, and pure. This judgment of Professor Wil-

kinson I would adopt for my own, and would add the verses in which he has described the poet :

Gentle in spirit as in mien severe;  
Calm but not cold; strength, majesty, and grace,  
Measure, and balance, and repose, in clear  
Lines, like a sculptor's, graven on the face——

Such image lovers of his verse have learned  
To limn their poet, peaceful after strife;  
A statue, as of life to marble turned?  
Nay, as of marble turned to breathing life.

I have taken interest in the story of Bryant's life and work, in large part because the religious and theological aspects of it have seemed to me to have been hitherto neglected. Our earliest American poet furnished no object-lesson of unbelief to his successors. He did not compass the whole range of Christian truth, any more than he compassed the whole range of poetic inspiration; but he taught his countrymen, and he taught the world, of God in nature and in history, of Christ as the Guide and Saviour of mankind, and of an immortal life that opens for us all beyond this present transitory scene. His teaching is all the more impressive and convincing because he does not speak to us as a preacher, but as a man; and because he utters only what he has seen and felt. He shows himself to be the true poet, by telling us the inner meaning of the universe, and by bringing us

Authentic tidings of invisible things.

## II

**RALPH WALDO EMERSON**



# RALPH WALDO EMERSON

## I

NINE years after Bryant, Emerson was born. Our second American poet began his life in 1803, half-way between the war of the Revolution and the war with England in 1812. The embattled farmers had won their independence, and they were ready for another fray. It was a time of sturdy self-assertion. The early Calvinism had been toned down by a discovery of the dignity of man. Emerson was the heir of eight successive generations of Puritan divines who had been gradually sloughing off their Puritanism and standing for what they regarded as natural freedom of thought. Straitened circumstances had trained him, as they trained Bryant, to plain living; his Cambridge surroundings were more favorable than were Bryant's to high thinking. His father was pastor of the First Unitarian Church of Boston, a pleasing preacher of somewhat latitudinarian doctrine and no stickler for the mere forms of religion. When this father died, he left a family of six children, all of them under ten years of age, of whom Ralph was the fourth son. The mother, with five hundred dollars a year from the church, kept boarders in order to support and educate her children. They sometimes lacked food, but then

their aunt, Mary Moody Emerson, a genius but a strict Calvinist, stayed their stomachs by telling them stories of heroic endurance. )

Ralph Waldo lived in an atmosphere of letters. He is described as a spiritual-looking boy in blue nankeen, angelic and remarkable. He had a lofty carriage of the head, which some attributed to pride, but which was wholly unconscious. There was no education of the playground or the nursery. Aunt Mary frowned upon mirth or frivolity in the children. The boy lived a life apart, and never learned to mingle freely with his fellows. School began when he was only three years old. He does not appear to have been a precocious scholar. In his college course at Harvard, he was not distinguished in his class, except for a certain poetical gift. He supported himself through college by serving as errand boy to the president, and by waiting on the table at commons. But all this nourished in him a habitual self-reliance, and the child was father of the man, for in his diary he wrote even then, "I purpose from this day to utter no essay or poem that is not absolutely and peculiarly my own."

Emerson's address on "The American Scholar," delivered at Cambridge in 1837, has been called "the intellectual Declaration of Independence of the United States." But that address was antedated by Bryant's dictum, eighteen years before, that American poets should seek to achieve original expression and should no longer imitate. It is easy to see that freedom was in the air, and that neither one of these writers had a monopoly of originality. Colonial subjection, even in literature, had had its day, and a new age was opening.



Both Bryant and Emerson felt the stirrings of a new life, the former in his vision of the New England landscape, the latter in his apprehension of the spirit which moved within it. Of the two, however, we must give the palm for simplicity and intelligibility to Bryant, though we acknowledge the superiority of Emerson in breadth and insight. I speak of their poetry, and I would liken Bryant's to the clear radiance of a summer morning, while Emerson's is like the fitful flashes which light up a summer evening cloud.

It is interesting to note that Emerson puts his poem of "The Sphinx" in the forefront of his published verses. This somewhat obscure and unmetrical production has significance as indicating his own estimate of his genius, and as boldly challenging the animadversions of his critics. Emerson is himself a sphinx. His writings propound a riddle, which is still unsolved. Is he philosopher, or poet, or prophet? Matthew Arnold denies that he is any one of these, and declares rather ambiguously that he is simply "the friend and aider of those who would live in the spirit." Emerson is doubtful about himself, for at one time he says, "It has been decided that I cannot write poetry"; at other times he writes: "I am half a bard, not a poet, but a lover of poetry and poets." "I am born a poet—of a lower class, no doubt, yet a poet." "I am not a great poet, but whatever is of me is a poet." "My singing, be sure, is very husky, and is for the most part in prose. Still I am a poet, in the sense of a preserver and dear lover of the harmonies that are in the soul and in matter, and specially of the correspondences between these and those." But James

Russell Lowell said of Emerson's verses, "They are pure pr——; no, they are not even prose."

Perhaps it is nearest the truth to say that he was a poetical philosopher. But even here we must qualify our statement. If organization of material is necessary to philosophy, Emerson was no philosopher, for he had no system. He speaks of his own "formidable tendency to the lapidary style. I build my house of boulders. Here I sit, and read and write, with very little system, and as far as regards composition with the most fragmentary result, paragraphs incomprehensible, each sentence an infinitely repellent particle." What philosophy he has is infinitely eclectic also—a medley of all philosophies—fate and free will, good and evil, God and man, being inextricably combined and confounded. I am more inclined to call him a prophet than to call him either a poet or a philosopher. The prophet utters some great and vital truth, but he mixes with this so much of error that he becomes too often a false prophet. What he says of Alcott is even more true of himself: "Gold ore is so combined with other elements that no chemistry is able to separate it without great loss."

Yet there is a leading and dominant thought in all his work, and we must grasp this, if we would understand either his poetry or his prose. It is the thought of the spiritual meaning of the world. Emerson, beyond all others, is the poet of transcendentalism, but of transcendentalism under bonds to a naturalistic philosophy. To explain and to justify this estimate will require some reflection, and I can at present only indicate the drift of my discussion. Since his verse is

exceedingly condensed and enigmatical, we can best understand it if we first study the larger and plainer expression of his thought in his essays. Let it suffice now to point out the fact that, as Emerson prefaced with "The Sphinx" the collection of his poems, so he made his address on "Nature" introduce the edition of his prose. Where one begins in philosophy, there he is likely to end. If we begin with the seemingly fixed successions of the outward world, we shall be apt to apply the category of necessity to man, and shall deny his freedom, responsibility, sin, and guilt; whereas, if we begin with man's conscience and free will, we have the only possible key to the mysteries of nature, for nature's laws are only the regularities of freedom. Emerson makes the fundamental mistake of interpreting man by nature, instead of interpreting nature by man. English Unitarians were materialists, and they thought of nature as consisting of dead lumps and as subject to unvarying law. Emerson did not wholly escape from their influence. "If you wish to understand intellectual philosophy," he says, "do not turn inward by introversion, but study natural science. Every time you discover a law of things, you discover a principle of mind." He adds, indeed, that if you wish to know nature, you must study mind. But, for all that, he begins with nature, and finds there his key to unlock the secrets of the soul.

Cabot, in his admirable biography of Emerson, seeks to mitigate any unfavorable judgment which this fact may lead us to form, by explaining what our author means by nature. In itself, he would say, nature is blind and opaque, is equivalent to fate, is the bondage

of the spirit. Man, as a part of nature, is the victim of environment. But he is not simply a part of nature; he is not mere effect; he potentially shares the cause. On one side of his being he is open to the divine Mind. He may detach himself from nature, he may be a finite creator. To thought and inspired will, nature is transparent and plastic. When we yield to the remedial force of spirit, evil is no more seen. The prerogative of man is to feel this infinity within him, and to make himself its willing instrument. Evil without only reflects his unbelief. There is freedom to resist the evil and to appropriate the powers of good. This is Cabot's ingenious interpretation of Emerson's doctrine. Emerson himself, in our opinion, would have smiled at it, as philosophically defining what he meant to leave undefined. He was no Ixion, to turn his cloud into a Juno. His conception of nature was not that of something external and capable of management by will. Nature, he would say, is itself will; but will without freedom, a necessitated and deterministic will; and the only essential difference between Emerson and Schopenhauer was that, in Emerson's view, this will makes for good, to Schopenhauer, for evil.

While thus indicating the fatal defect in Emerson's thinking, we may, with all the more frankness, credit him with whatever is good in transcendentalism. That much abused and little understood word denoted a method of thought compounded of English idealism, German intuitionism, and Oriental immanence. In England, Locke had declared that intellect has no ideas which are not ultimately derived from the senses. Leibnitz, however, had replied that intellect itself can-

not be so derived; and Berkeley had insisted that material things cannot be proved to exist apart from mind. It was easy for Hume to infer that we know mental substance within, as little as we know material substance without. Emerson did not conclude, with Hume, that we need no cause for our ideas, in the world, in the soul, or in God. He rather held with Berkeley, that, while things do not exist independently of consciousness, they do exist independently of *our* consciousness, namely, in the mind of God, who in a correct philosophy takes the place of a mindless external world as the cause of our ideas.

Emerson's transcendentalism regarded the universe as spiritual rather than material, and in this he rendered a great service to contemporary thought. English theology had hardened into Deism—God was far away, an absentee God, sitting on the outside of the universe ever since he made it. New England had felt the influence. The old Calvinism was superseded by Arminianism, and American independence recognized the kingdom of man rather than the kingdom of God. It was well that Emerson struck the note of idealism. It summoned his generation to a new recognition of the spiritual nature of the world. If his protest against materialism had only been accompanied by a deeper ethical study of man, he might have led his followers into theism rather than into pantheism. Norton calls Emerson's essay on Nature "an outburst of Romanticism on Puritan ground," and Romanticism was pantheistic rather than theistic.

German intuitionism was the second factor in Emerson's transcendentalism. Kant, in his investiga-

tion of our processes of knowing, had shown the element of truth in the discarded doctrine of innate ideas, and had declared that the mind employs, in all its exercises, assumptions of time and space, substance and cause, design and right, assumptions which never can be proved, because they are the basis of all proof. The categories are intuitional. We have an original and unverifiable knowledge of principles which lie at the basis of all thinking; and, though these principles are undemonstrable, our mental and moral nature is so constructed that we cannot avoid acting upon them. Here, and not in mere argument, lies our reason for belief in God. Emerson seized upon the element of truth in intuitionalism, but he sadly exaggerated and perverted it. Instead of accepting it as the regulative principle of all knowledge, he transformed it into a positive source of knowledge. Instead of learning from it *how* we are to learn, he learned from it *what* we are to learn. The inner light took the place of all the outer lights which God has given us. Man became a law to himself; ceased to recognize authority of any sort; had no need of revelation from without. "We must not seek advantages from another," says Emerson; "the fountain of all good is in ourselves. . . Each admirable genius is but a successful diver in that sea whose floor of pearls is all your own. . . Be lord of a day, through wisdom and justice, and you can put up your history-books." It is as if, in virtue of our eyesight, we should deny that we need external light whereby to see, or require any special objects to be lit up by that light, or are dependent upon the sun from which that light shines upon us.

This is the proper place to state our chief objection to Emerson's intuitionism, and to point out the need of that external authority which he rejected. God does not leave the child or the race to build up all its knowledge anew. As acquired truth finds legitimate forms of expression, it becomes authority for others than those who originally perceived it. All advance in human intelligence depends upon our reverent reception of the treasure which comes to us from the past. God requires us to trust his historic revelations, and to pay respect to the teaching of parents, discoverers, and experts, in education, business, science, and art. Religious truth is particularly subject to this law. We are not the first who have come in contact with God, since all men live, move, and have their being in him. God's revelations to the individual always build upon his teachings of the race. To despise authority, and to set ourselves up as primary recipients of revelation, is to pour contempt upon the whole process of evolution and the organic connection of the generations; is, in short, to substitute individualism for racial unity. Individual experiences of God and of his grace have been recorded in Scripture, and the Scriptures accordingly are able to make us wise unto salvation. They specially and predominantly testify to Christ as a divine and atoning Saviour, and show how his teaching and work have made God accessible to men. God bids us bow to Christ, as his representative, and as our supreme authority; and the witness of God is this, that God gave to us eternal life, and that this life is in his Son.

God is light. But light diffused cannot be seen; we

see *by* it, but we do not see *it*; it will not be recognized, unless it is concentrated; hence the sun, the physical luminary. So no man has seen God at any time—"whom no man has seen or can see"; the invisible God needs to be manifested; hence the Son, the spiritual luminary. Finite beings will always need more than "the light that lighteth every man," need more than the diffused light of nature and conscience and intuition. Even in heaven that diffused light is not enough, for "though they need no candle nor light of the sun" because "the Lord God gives them light," it is expressly declared that "the lamp thereof is the Lamb"—in Christ alone is God's light concentrated and made visible to his creatures.

Emerson's intuitions are not a trustworthy expression of the infinite Reason. They are colored by finiteness and sin. They lack the sense of the ideal. They unduly magnify the physical. In Brahminism, such intuitions glorify the lustful and the base. They turn might into right, and the self into God. Intuition needs the corrective of special revelation, and that revelation is given to us in Christ. Authority is, therefore, neither purely objective on the one hand, nor purely subjective on the other, for man is neither permanently infantile, nor fully mature; he is not wholly dependent upon human teachers, nor does he discover all truth himself. Christianity is, first, objective manifestation of truth, in the Sun and the Son; then, secondly, subjective appropriation of truth, by the cooperation of spirit with Spirit; that is, of the human spirit with the divine Spirit.

What is the place of the Bible in this revelation? I



reply that the Bible is a telescope between man and God; it is the rending of a veil. We do not worship the telescope, on the one hand, nor, on the other hand, do we refuse to use it. It is an authority in astronomy. Similarly, the written records of Christianity are our authority in religion. Give them up, trust your intuitions, and you may have Christian Science, or pantheism, or Romanist worship of Virgin and saints, and a hierarchy that destroys human freedom. Give up historic Christianity, and you put an end to Christian life and experience. Faith in the authority of Scripture is perfectly consistent with free inquiry as to the method of its evolution and inspiration. No criticism, higher or lower, can destroy its life. The total teaching of the Bible is ascertainable on all points that are essential to salvation; for salvation is dependent not on the book, but on the person of Jesus Christ, who is revealed in the book. Union with Christ is the one essential, and belief in Scripture and the church is incidental. The Bible record of historic facts and of past experience is authority for us, because it makes known Christ and brings us in contact with him. The Bible does not take the place of Christ; its authority is not original; it simply reveals Christ, who is the authority.

All this throws light upon one of the great heresies of modern theology, this namely, that the Bible is only a record of human experiences, and not a revelation from God. What is to prevent God from revealing himself through those very experiences? Why may he not so utter his messages that they shall be actual voices from on high? Grant that the revelation is pro-

gressive. Still may we believe in the unity, sufficiency, and authority of Scripture.

Oriental immanence contributed a final element to Emerson's transcendentalism. The doctrine of the Over-Soul, in which every man's particular being is contained, is indeed the central principle of his thinking. He regarded God as immanent, not only in nature, but also in man; one Mind is common to all men; and each man is a new incarnation. "I am part and parcel of God," he said. "The simplest person, who in his integrity worships God, becomes God." Both nature and humanity were in this way so glorified that strange inferences were sometimes drawn. He called mandarin oranges "Christianity in apples." A story is current that, at the opera, Emerson and Margaret Fuller were gazing at the ballet, when Miss Fuller remarked, "Ralph, this is poetry!" and he replied, "Margaret, this is religion!"

Doctor Harrison, of Kenyon College, has written a valuable book on "The Teachers of Emerson," in which he aims to disclose the sources of Emerson's doctrine. He traces it back ultimately to Plato, though he grants that Neoplatonism had greater influence upon Emerson than had Plato himself. Plato certainly taught the ineffable unity of all being, by reason of its participation in the divine ideas. But this was not the peculiar doctrine of Emerson. He taught the immanence of an active God in humanity and the mystical union of humanity with Deity. He found this doctrine in the Neoplatonic speculations of the Alexandrian Plotinus, and the ecstatic utterances of the Hindu Vedas fell in with his thought. He was not a profound stu-

dent of the mystics, any more than he was a profound student of the philosophers. He was no great scholar, and it was mainly translations that he read. But he had a way of appropriating whatever suited his purpose; like Molière he could say, "*Je prends mon bien ou je le trouve.*" Tauler, Fox, Swedenborg, furnished him with material, and he did not disdain to borrow from the Persian Saadi and Omar Khayyam. He made his own whatever in all literature asserted the presence and energy of God in every particle of the universe and in every human soul.

If Spinoza could be called "a God-intoxicated man," Emerson was even better entitled to this designation; for while Spinoza's God was only Nature, Emerson's God still retained some of the attributes of personality derived from Calvinism. The survival of elements belonging to Emerson's ancestral religion is indeed all that rescues his work from gross idolatry of nature. In so many words, he denied God's personality: "I say that I cannot find, when I explore my own consciousness, any truth in saying that God is a person, but the reverse. . . To represent him as an individual is to shut him out of my consciousness." But let us be just to Emerson. By personality, he may mean nothing but limitation to an individual. He also says: "I deny personality to God, because it is too little, not too much. Life, personal life, is faint and cold, to the energy of God. For Reason and Love and Beauty, or that which is all these—it is the life of life, the reason of reason, the love of love." Emerson should have remembered that it is finiteness, and not personality, that implies limitation: an infinite personality may be

unlimited. And, as will in man is the highest and most inclusive attribute of his personality, we cannot deny personality to God without depriving him of will. Such denial makes him identical with nature and not its informing Spirit; conterminous with nature and not above it. And since all we know of nature we know from the processes of our own minds, God is identified with those processes; we have no knowledge of him as existing apart from ourselves; we find God only within our own souls; he is immanent but not transcendent. Thus transcendentalism contradicts itself and becomes self-deification. It is the precise opposite of the Scripture representation, which speaks of God as not only "in all," and "through all," but also "above all." The God whom the Bible recognizes as immanent is a God of will, as well as of power; a God of wisdom and love and holiness; a God who can come down in special ways to his creatures; and who can reveal himself in Christ, as their Saviour from the penalty and the power of sin. The God of Emerson, on the other hand, is a mere abstraction, a mere idealization of nature. He tells us that

Conscious Law is King of kings.<sup>1</sup>

But he might also have called Law *unconscious*, for he denied to it personality; and Doctor Ware said well, in criticism of Emerson's doctrine: "Law, truth, love, are no Deity. There must be some Being, to exercise these attributes. There is a *personal* God, or there is *no* God."

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<sup>1</sup> "Woodnotes," II.

We can appreciate the gravity of this error, if we contrast Emerson's view of nature with that of another Puritan, Jonathan Edwards. Edwards escapes from Emerson's moral indifference, and from his blindness to personality in God, by recognizing in nature the presence and working of Jesus Christ, in whom all things were created and in whom all things consist. Edwards writes:

"He who, by his immediate influence, gives being every moment, and by his Spirit actuates the world, because he inclines to communicate himself and his excellencies, doth doubtless communicate his excellency to bodies, as far as there is any consent or analogy. And the beauty of face and sweet airs in men are not always the effect of the corresponding excellencies of the mind; yet the beauties of nature are really emanations or shadows of the excellencies of the Son of God. So that, when we are delighted with flowery meadows and gentle breezes of wind, we may consider that we see only the emanations of the sweet benevolence of Jesus Christ. When we behold the fragrant rose and lily, we see his love and purity. So the green trees and fields, and singing of birds, are the emanations of his infinite joy and benignity. The easiness and naturalness of trees and vines are shadows of his beauty and loveliness. The crystal rivers and murmuring streams are the footsteps of his favor, grace, and beauty. When we behold the light and brightness of the sun, the golden edges of an evening cloud, or the beauteous bow, we behold the adumbrations of his glory and goodness, and, in the blue sky, of his mildness and gentleness. There are also many things wherein we may behold his awful majesty: in the sun in his strength, in comets, in thunder, in the hovering thunder-clouds, in ragged rocks and the brows of mountains. That beauteous light wherewith the world is filled in a clear day is a lively shadow of his spotless holiness, and happiness and delight in communicating himself. And doubtless this is a reason why Christ is compared so often to these things, and called by their names, as the Sun of Righteousness, the Morning Star, the Rose of Sharon, and

Lily of the Valley, the apple tree among the trees of the wood, a bundle of myrrh, a roe, or a young hart. By this we discover the beauty of many of those metaphors and similes which to an unphilosophical person do seem so uncouth. In like manner, when we behold the beauty of man's body in its perfection, we still see like emanations of Christ's divine perfections, although they do not always flow from the mental excellencies of the person that has them. But we see the most proper image of the beauty of Christ when we see beauty in the human soul."

This is the true transcendentalism, which sees in all nature Christ's manifestation of a personal and loving God. But this is plainly not the transcendentalism of Emerson.

Our author said to Dr. William Hague that fresh readings of the Quaker writers had intensified his conviction that we must outgrow externalism. George Fox always remained one of his heroes; though, as Doctor Van Dyke remarks, he was himself "kept sane by his New England sense and humor." He saw how indistinct was the line that separated religious ecstasy from hysterical frenzy. Yet the inner light seemed to him the only medium of divine communication. Why should we not enjoy religion by revelation *to us*, he thought, instead of getting it *through others*? This suggests the fundamental defect in Emerson's character. Both Henry James and John Morley have pointed out that Emerson had no sense of sin. He regarded his soul as the unresisting organ of the Over-Soul, and serene self-sufficiency characterized all his writing and all his action. He needed no teacher. His own finiteness and limitation never led him to distrust his own powers; his own sinfulness and guilt never

taught him dependence on a Redeemer. His was not the humility of the little child which Jesus himself exemplifies, and which he makes the condition of entrance into his kingdom. Rather do we find in him a Stoic confidence that all is well, and an ignoring of the evil aspects of life, both in himself and in others. "The riddle of the painful earth"—human sin and shame and death—this has escaped the notice of the Sphinx, and the result is that Emerson lacks sympathy for the fallen and understanding of the world's great need. He had no experience of the Inferno of guilt and retribution, such as a keen conscience gave to Dante, and therefore he could know nothing of the Paradiso of the forgiven, nor of the Purgatorio of repentance and faith that prepares men for blessedness and likeness to God. He thought Dante "a man to put in a museum, but not in his house."

Emerson's overgrown self-trust disdained to recognize himself as a sinner. "They that are whole need not a physician." He taught that man's shortcoming is not sin, but only a necessary stage in this progress. It is the "green apple theory" of moral evil. Sin is a green apple, which needs only time and sunshine and growth to bring it to ripeness and beauty and usefulness. But alas! our sin is not a green apple that can be ripened by growth, but an apple with a worm at the heart, whose progress, if left to itself, is toward rottenness and ruin. Sin is apostasy and revolt of man's free will, which only supernatural means can cure. Emerson's false premise that we must look to physics, rather than to ethics, for our interpretation of God's being, leads him to the false conclusion that sin is

a necessity in the universe, and that it always results in good. When man's free will is left out of the account, there is no such thing as guilt or just condemnation. In all evil man is ignorantly seeking good:

"The fiend that man harries  
Is love of the Best;  
Yawns the pit of the Dragon,  
Lit by rays from the Blest.  
The Lethe of Nature  
Can't trance him again,  
Whose soul sees the perfect,  
Which his eyes seek in vain.

"Pride ruined the angels,  
Their shame them restores;  
Lurks the joy that is sweetest  
In stings of remorse."<sup>2</sup>

Out of the good of evil born,  
Came Uriel's voice of cherub scorn,  
And a blush tinged the upper sky,  
And the gods shook, they knew not why.<sup>3</sup>

If these mysterious lines mean only that the forces of the universe are by an omniscient and beneficent will made even in spite of themselves to help the cause of truth and righteousness, they might be regarded as a cryptic declaration of Paul's doctrine that all things work together for good to them that love God. "Write it on your heart," says Emerson, "that every day is the best day in the year." Yes, we reply, if this means that our best days in the past have not exhausted God's power and love. But if it asserts an automatic inclination of evil toward good and that sin

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<sup>2</sup> "The Sphinx."

<sup>3</sup> "Uriel."



is its own remedy, it teaches pernicious error. That this latter interpretation may be suspected to be the correct one finds some justification in Emerson's poem "The Park":

The prosperous and beautiful  
To me seem not to wear  
The yoke of conscience masterful,  
Which galls me everywhere.

Yet spake yon purple mountain,  
Yet said yon ancient wood,  
That Night or Day, that Love or Crime,  
Leads all souls to the Good.

Give all to love;  
Obey thy heart;  
Friends, kindred, days,  
Estate, good fame,  
Plans, credit, and the Muse,—  
Nothing refuse.

Stealing grace from all alive;  
Heartily know,  
When half-gods go,  
The gods arrive.\*

I cannot spare water or wine,  
Tobacco-leaf, or poppy, or rose;  
From the earth-poles to the Line,  
All between that works or grows,  
Everything is kin of mine.

Too long shut in strait and few,  
Thinly dieted on dew,  
I will use the world, and sift it,  
To a thousand humors shift it,  
As you spin a cherry.

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\* "Give All to Love."

O doleful ghosts, and goblins merry!  
 O all you virtues, methods, mights,  
 Means, appliances, delights,  
 Reputed wrongs and braggart rights,  
 Smug routine, and things allowed,  
 Minorities, things under cloud!  
 Hither! take me, use me, fill me,  
 Vein and artery, though ye kill me!<sup>a</sup>

One thing is forever good;  
 That one thing is Success,—  
 Dear to the Eumenides,  
 And to all the heavenly brood.  
 Who bides at home, nor looks abroad,  
 Carries the eagles, and masters the sword.<sup>a</sup>

These quotations show how far Emerson was from recognizing evil as a "body of death" which required a Deliverer. It is only a discord necessary to perfect harmony; it is only the dark background without which we could not appreciate the bright; it is indeed the soil from which truth and goodness must emerge. "Our crimes," he says, "may be lively stones, out of which we shall construct the temple of the true God." We must even see in moral evil a manifestation of God's nature:

Higher far into the pure realm,  
 Over sun and star,  
 Over the flickering Dæmon film,  
 Thou must mount for love;  
 Into vision where all form  
 Into one only form dissolves;  
 In a region where the wheel  
 On which all beings ride  
 Visibly revolves;  
 Where the starred, eternal worm

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<sup>a</sup> "Mithridates."

<sup>a</sup> "Destiny."

Girds the world with bound and term;  
Where unlike things are like;  
Where good and ill,  
And joy and moan,  
Melt into one.<sup>7</sup>

"Woe to them that call evil good, and good evil," said the ancient prophet. Yet this ignoring of sin is the fundamental error of Emerson's teaching. There can be no question about his sincerity, and the sweetness and cheerfulness of his disposition. He had never experienced serious conflicts with his own nature, and he seldom, if ever, was conscious of moral imperfection. In his early life indeed he writes: "Milton was enamored of moral perfection. He did not love it more than I. That which I cannot declare has been my angel from childhood until now. It has separated me from men. It has driven sleep from my bed. It has tortured me for my guilt. It has inspired me with hope." And his poem entitled "Grace" has lines which seem almost Christian:

How much, preventing God, how much I owe  
To the defences thou hast round me set;  
Example, custom, fear, occasion slow,—  
These scorned bondmen were my parapet.  
I dare not peep over this parapet  
To gauge with glance the roaring gulf below,  
The depths of sin to which I had descended,  
Had not these me against myself defended!

But the remedy is all in self and not in God. Self, indeed, is an effluence and manifestation of God:

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<sup>7</sup> "The Celestial Love."

So nigh is grandeur to our dust,  
 So near is God to man,  
 When Duty whispers low, *Thou must*,  
 The youth replies, *I can*.<sup>a</sup>

"The essence of Christianity," he says, "is in its practical morals." We must summon up our better nature, our lofty ideals, our strength of will:

Freedom's secret wilt thou know?—  
 Counsel not with flesh and blood;  
 Loiter not for cloak or food;  
 Right thou feelest, rush to do.<sup>b</sup>

There is little comfort here for the sin-sick and despairing. Emerson preaches salvation *by* character, when man's first need is salvation *from* character. Yet we must concede that he presents a winning picture of Pelagian virtue. Father Taylor, the seaman's preacher, was severely orthodox, but when Emerson died, and some one intimated a doubt of his eternal fate, Taylor gallantly remarked: "Well, if Emerson has gone to hell, all I can say is that the climate will speedily change, and immigration will rapidly set in. He might *think* this or that, but he *was* more like Jesus Christ than any one I have ever known. The devil will not know what to do with him." But this same Father Taylor gave it as his verdict that "Emerson knows no more of the religion of the New Testament than Balaam's ass did of the principles of Hebrew grammar."

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<sup>a</sup> "Voluntaries."

<sup>b</sup> "Freedom."

## II

All that I have said thus far is meant as an introduction to his poetry, and to the understanding of its theological significance. Emerson's conception of poetry will help us here. To him the poet was the emancipated man, lifted into consciousness of his divine Original, with insight into the hidden meaning of the world, and foresight of the end to which the world is hastening:

The free winds told him what they knew,  
Discoursed of fortune as they blew;

. . . . .

And on his mind at dawn of day  
Soft shadows of the evening lay.<sup>10</sup>

But he does not regard this elevation and ecstasy as peculiar to the poet: it is only an intensification of moods that belong at times to the common man:

In the deep heart of man a poet dwells  
Who all the day of life his summer story tells.<sup>11</sup>

For this reason the poet appeals to the universal heart of man; he rouses in us the same emotions that swayed himself; he teaches us the habit of thinking for ourselves. Emerson counted among "the traits common to all works of the highest art that they are universally intelligible, that they restore to us the simplest states of mind."

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<sup>10</sup> "The Poet."

<sup>11</sup> "The Enchanter."

That wit and joy might find a tongue,  
And earth grow civil, HOMER sung.<sup>13</sup>

To clothe the fiery thought  
In simple words succeeds,  
For still the craft of genius is  
To mask a king in weeds.<sup>13</sup>

This is the first of Milton's essential characteristics of poetry: it must be "simple, sensuous, passionate." But Emerson is not true to his own principle. He is not always simple, he is not always intelligible, and he is generally cold in temper rather than impassioned. The philosopher and the seer too often interfere with the poet. He must needs plunge into the unknown, and disclose things beyond all power of human speech:

Ever the Poet *from* the land  
Steers his bark and trims his sail;  
Right out to sea his courses stand,  
New worlds to find in pinnacle frail.<sup>14</sup>

And when he has found truth undiscovered before, he must give it utterance in ways that will stir men's hearts by their novelty, even though they break with every tradition of meter and of rhyme. I doubt whether Emerson was ever consciously sensational, but his lordly method is not the method of true poetry, when he writes:

Great is the art,  
Great be the manners, of the bard.  
He shall not his brain encumber  
With the coil of rhythm and number;  
But, leaving rule and pale forethought,

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<sup>13</sup> "Solution."

<sup>13</sup> "Quatrains."

<sup>14</sup> "Quatrains."

He shall aye climb  
 For his rhyme.  
 'Pass in, pass in,' the angels say,  
 'In to the upper doors,  
 Nor count compartments of the floors,  
 But mount to paradise  
 By the stairway of surprise.'"<sup>18</sup>

We have seen that Emerson had no ear for music; it is also plain that he never grappled with metrical problems, or realized that the laws of harmony are those of God. He can make such imperfect rhymes *norm* and *form*, *pans* and *romance*, *feeble* and *peo-*  
*abroad* and *Lord*, *sodden* and *forgotten*, *hear* and *shrine* and *within*. There is a jerkiness and distance about many of his verses which reveal a lamental artistic defect, as well as a careless audacity. We must credit him with the substance of poetry, but must deny that he has mastered its form. He is a stranger to the melody of Shelley; and, though he was one of his demigods, that supreme literary master did not influence him to follow his example. The result is an obscure and disjointed verse, with occasional bursts of trumpetlike and thrilling beauty; while the real power of his writing is to be found mainly in prose. I cannot assent to Stedman's characterization of him as "our most typical and inspiring poet." Theodore Parker called Emerson "a poet lacking the accomplishment of verse"—which means that his gift was that of poetical prose. Matthew Arnold said well: "Emerson's is the most important work of the nineteenth century in prose, as Wordsworth's is the

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Merlin."

most important work of that same century in poetry; and to that estimate we may well subscribe.

When I seek to illustrate Emerson's theological ideas by citations from his verse, I am met with the ever-outstanding fact that all his poetry is an endless reiteration of one great truth, together with an ignoring of the other truth which prevents it from having all the effect of error. There is a pendulum swing in human thought. Divinity and humanity, fate and freedom, each has its rights. Woe be to the age that builds its system of thought upon either one to the exclusion of the other! The pendulum will certainly swing to the opposite extreme. New England had become Arminian and sterile; the fountains of the great deep needed to be broken up; Emerson showed us an open heaven and a present God. In this he did a service to his generation. "Unlovely, nay, frightful," he says, "is the solitude of the soul without God." But this recognition passes immediately into identification. The soul that recognizes God becomes itself God, and God himself becomes another name for our human life and activity:

This is Jove, who, deaf to prayers,  
Floods with blessings unawares.  
Draw, if thou canst, the mystic line  
Severing rightly his from thine,  
Which is human, which divine.

What God is this, who cannot or will not hear the prayers of his worshipers and who is indistinguishable from ourselves? This is indeed the Roman Jove; it is not our Father who is in heaven. The pagan God is not God at all, but only an idol of the human imagi-



nation, a creation of our human selfishness and sin. The blessings with which he floods us unawares come from no mind of justice or heart of love. No communion with him is possible; he is simply the impersonal spirit of the universe, the nature-god of pantheism, a god who has no eye to pity and no arm to save in the stern emergencies of men's need.

What was Emerson's doctrine of prayer? He certainly did not believe in petition for specific gifts or blessings. That, to his mind, would be impudence, and insult to law and Lawgiver. "Prayer that craves a particular commodity, anything less than all good, is vicious." "Men's prayers are a disease of the will, as their creeds are a disease of the intellect." Yet prayer is natural to man; it may lift him into harmony with the divine will; it may give him new insight and courage. It will be sheer perversion to expect any alteration in things external to ourselves. Emerson gave up public prayer, as he gave up the Lord's Supper, because he regarded it as encouraging superstition:

When success exalts thy lot,  
God for thy virtue lays a plot:  
And all thy life is for thine own,  
Then for mankind's instruction shown;  
And though thy knees were never bent,  
To Heaven thy hourly prayers are sent,  
And whether formed for good or ill,  
Are registered and answered still.<sup>16</sup>

O, when I am safe in my sylvan home,  
I tread on the pride of Greece and Rome;  
For what are they all, in their high conceit,  
When man in the bush with God may meet?<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> "Prayer."

<sup>17</sup> "Good-bye."

In the name of Godhead, I  
The morrow front, and can defy;  
Though I am weak, yet God, when prayed,  
Cannot withhold his conquering aid.<sup>18</sup>

But God's "conquering aid" is really nothing but the new determination of the human soul, and God is but a figure of speech:

Around the man who seeks a noble end,  
Not angels but divinities attend.<sup>19</sup>

Emerson scoffs at the "pistareen Providence" of George Müller and his Orphan Houses. Piety, he thinks, is here "pulled down to the pantry and the shoe-closet, till we are distressed for fresh air, God coming precisely as he is called for, to the hour and minute." Yet Jesus said, "Ask, and ye shall receive"; and Paul urges us, "in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving," to let our "requests be made known unto God." Emerson's God does not hear and cannot answer prayer.

He spoke of "the burdensome doctrine of a Deity." But he meant only to clear himself of definitions, and to accept whatever impressions came to him, mutually contradictory though they might be. This gives an appearance of fairness to his writings, though it really shows that he had no settled belief with regard to the most serious questions that vex the soul. "Cannot I trust the Goodness that has uplifted to uphold me?" he says. "I cannot find in the world, without or within, any antidote, any bulwark, against this fear,

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<sup>18</sup> "The Nun's Aspiration."

<sup>19</sup> "Life."

like this: the frank acknowledgment of unbounded dependence. Let into the heart that is filled with prosperity the idea of God, and it smooths the giddy precipices of human pride to a substantial level." He can even acknowledge "the wholesomeness of Calvinism for thousands and thousands. I would not discourage their scrupulous religious observances." Calvinism, he holds, "is an imperfect version of the moral law. Unitarianism is another." "It is well for my Protestantism that there is no Cathedral in Concord. Unitarians forget that men are poets. . . I have very good grounds for being a Unitarian, and for being a Trinitarian too. . . The highest revelation is that God is in every man. Our reason is not to be distinguished from the divine essence; and all forms of doctrine are but shadows and symbols of invisible reality."

Ever the Rock of Ages melts  
 Into the mineral air,  
 To be the quarry whence to build  
 Thought and its mansions fair.

Ascending through just degrees  
 To a consummate holiness,  
 As angel blind to trespass done,  
 And bleaching all souls like the sun.<sup>20</sup>

Oh what is Heaven but the fellowship  
 Of minds that each can stand against the  
                   world  
 By its own meek and incorruptible will?<sup>21</sup>

On this theory, truth is simply what men "trow," and things are what men "think." All reality is subjective.

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<sup>20</sup> "Life."

<sup>21</sup> "Self-reliance," lines added in 1833.

In spite of these shortcomings, Emerson's *positive* doctrine was a blessing to New England. "The infinitude of the private man," and the possibility of his first-hand acquaintance with the Deity, were lessons which the church and the world greatly needed to learn. Sacraments and Bible were never intended as a substitute for direct communion with Christ. Much that our author says of God in the soul, and of the soul's expression of God in the world, is capable of a Christian interpretation. Emerson never reaches a greater height of imaginative fervor than in his poem entitled "The Problem," and this alone will give him enduring fame, when other works of his are forgotten, though even here there is mingled with a noble recognition of God's working in humanity a fatal denial of any worth in the externals of religion:

I like a church; I like a cowl;  
 I love a prophet of the soul;  
 And on my heart monastic aisles  
 Fall like sweet strains, or pensive smiles:  
 Yet not for all his faith can see  
 Would I that cowlèd churchman be.

. . . . .  
 The hand that rounded Peter's dome  
 And groined the aisles of Christian Rome  
 Wrought in a sad sincerity;  
 Himself from God he could not free;  
 He builded better than he knew;—  
 The conscious stone to beauty grew.

. . . . .  
 These temples grew as grows the grass;  
 Art might obey, but not surpass.  
 The passive Master lent his hand  
 To the vast soul that o'er him planned;

And the same power that reared the shrine  
 Bestrode the tribes that knelt within.  
 Ever the fiery Pentecost  
 Girds with one flame the countless host.

One accent of the Holy Ghost  
 The heedless world hath never lost.

And yet, for all his faith could see,  
 I would not the good bishop be.

The final test of a poet's worth must be his conception of Christ. By his attitude toward our Lord he will be judged at the last day, and by that standard Christian people must judge him now. He who does not accept Christ as Lord of all fails to recognize him as Lord at all. To a Christian heart, Emerson's slighting and half-contemptuous allusions to Jesus are deeply painful. He seems to take pleasure in tearing the crown from the brow of our Redeemer. "My brothers, my mother, my companions, must be much more to me, in all respects of friendship, than he can be." He regards the incarnation as poorly expressing the eternal indwelling of God in man. He had wished that his son

Might break his daily bread  
 With prophet, savior and head;  
 That he might cherish for his own  
 The riches of sweet Mary's Son,  
 Boy-Rabbi, Israel's paragon.<sup>22</sup>

Christianity, he acknowledges, is "the most emphatic affirmation of man's spiritual nature. But not

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<sup>22</sup> "Threnody."

the only one, nor the last. There shall be a thousand more."

For what need I of book or priest,  
Or sibyl from the mummied East,  
When every star is Bethlehem star?  
I count as many as there are  
Cinquefoils or violets in the grass,  
So many saints and saviors,  
So many high behaviors  
Salute the bard who is alive  
And only sees what he doth give.<sup>23</sup>

Emerson ranks Jesus among the great men of the races. Christian associations, he says, are "the fruit of the life and teachings of the lowly Nazarene. An obscure man, in an obscure crowd, brought forward a new Scripture. His cross has been erected, and it has been to some a pillar of cloud, and to some a pillar of fire." But he puts our Lord side by side with Plato and Philo and Shakespeare:

One in a Judæan manger,  
And one by Avon stream,  
One over against the mouths of Nile,  
And one in the Academe.<sup>24</sup>

I see all human wits  
Are measured by a few;  
Unmeasured still my Shakspeare sits,  
Lone as the blessed Jew.<sup>25</sup>

If Emerson had taken conscience instead of nature for his guide, he would have found the key to the world's great problem, and would have appreciated the solution which is furnished in Jesus Christ, for

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<sup>23</sup> "The Poet."

<sup>24</sup> "Song of Nature."

<sup>25</sup> "Shakspeare."

the revelation of saving love in Jesus Christ is the only remedy for the world's guilt and misery. But Emerson could see in Christ only the likeness of himself. He speaks condescendingly of "that best and dearest saint," "that excellent teacher whom God sent," "not a solitary, but still a lovely herald"; but he discounts the "noxious exaggeration of the person of Jesus," and he banished that person from genuine religion. He praises "the lowliness of the blessed soul that walked in Judea and hallowed that land forever"; but he thought he could not himself be a man, if he "must subordinate his nature to Christ's nature." "Jesus would absorb the race," he said, "but Tom Paine, or the coarsest blasphemer, helps humanity by resisting this exuberance of power." He failed to see that Jesus not only absorbs but transforms, and that we grow, only by the impact of nobler souls than our own. The age-long yearning of the human race for God in human form made no impression on him. "That exalted person who died on Calvary," he thinks, "will be better loved by not being adored." "Only a barbarous state of society thought to add to his dignity by making him King, and God."

Emerson broke with his church and left the ministry because he could not celebrate the Lord's Supper—it implied a profounder reverence for Jesus than he could give him. "It seemed to me at church to-day," he says, "that the communion service, as it is now and here celebrated, is a document of the dulness of the race. How these, my good neighbors, the bending deacons, with their cups and plates, would have straightened themselves to sturdiness, if the proposition

came before them to honor thus a fellow man!" Yes, verily! And it was only common honesty on Emerson's part, when he came to regard Jesus as only one of "many saints and saviors," to give up his clerical office and thenceforth substitute the lecture platform for the pulpit. His teaching was no longer "crippled by making it depend on Jesus." But it also became merely the fallible message of a human seer, instead of the power of God unto salvation. Of himself he said well, "I find in me no enthusiasm, no resources, for the instruction and guidance of the people."

A Nature-God cannot hate evil, for it is his creation, and a preliminary and partial manifestation of his own being. Though Emerson has been called the teacher of Puritan ethics, as Jonathan Edwards was the teacher of Puritan religion, it would be difficult to mention any principle more subversive of morals than is Emerson's dictum that moral evil is only privative, as darkness is only the absence of light. Sin is no longer the positive assertion of a godless will, but is merely the absence of knowledge, the effect of ignorance, to be removed by education. It is not enmity to God, or even unlikeness to him. God is no longer holy, since sin is ordained by him as a means of ultimate perfection. The selfishness and pride and hate and lust of man are only good in the making; the stumbling of the child in order that he may learn to walk. Emerson becomes, like Carlyle, a worshiper of successful force. Whatever is, is right, and his optimism can find good in Cain and in Judas. His poem entitled "Cupido" is a practical avowal of this pantheism:



The solid, solid universe  
Is pervious to Love;  
With bandaged eyes he never errs,  
Around, below, above.  
His blinding light  
He flingeth white  
On God's and Satan's brood,  
And reconciles  
By mystic wiles  
The evil and the good.

In his "Xenophanes" he propounds this same doctrine of absolute unity in its most extreme form:

All things  
Are of one pattern made; bird, beast and flower,  
Song, picture, form, space, thought and character  
Deceive us, seeming to be many things,  
And are but one. Beheld far off, they part  
As God and devil; bring them to the mind,  
They dull its edge with their monotony.  
To know one element, explore another,  
And in the second reappears the first.

Over me soared the eternal sky,  
Full of light and of deity;  
Again I saw, again I heard,  
The rolling river, the morning bird;—  
Beauty through my senses stole;  
I yielded myself to the perfect whole.\*

All this means, not that the world is the *symbol* of spirit, but that the world *is* spirit. "God is the life of all. Every mountain is a Sinai; every tree a burning bush; every breeze a still, small voice. Each soul is an expression of the Over-Soul, and reigns supreme over matter." As positive and negative are two in-

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\* "Each and All."

separable poles of the magnet, so matter and mind, good and evil, are alike manifestations of the universal Spirit. The poem "Cupido," in spite of its poetical beauty, and of the Christian interpretation which may be given to its opening lines, is Hindu and pagan in essence. The author's poem "Brahma" indeed is only a rendering in English of that heathen and immoral philosophy:

If the red slayer think he slays,  
Or if the slain think he is slain,  
They know not well the subtle ways  
I keep, and pass, and turn again.

Far or forgot to me is near;  
Shadow and sunlight are the same;  
The vanished gods to me appear;  
And one to me are shame and fame.

They reckon ill who leave me out;  
When me they fly, I am the wings;  
I am the doubter and the doubt,  
And I the hymn the Brahmin sings.

The strong gods pine for my abode,  
And pine in vain the sacred Seven;  
But thou, meek lover of the good!  
Find me, and turn thy back on heaven.

What is this but a confounding of all moral distinctions? We should not wish never to have sinned, for sin is necessary to the development of holiness. "For the intellect," Emerson says, "there is no crime. . . Saints are sad, because they behold sin from the point of view of the conscience, and not of the intellect—a confusion of thought. . . Man, though in brothels or jails, or on gibbets, is on his way to all that is good and true. . . The carrion that rots in the

sun, the criminal who breaks every law of God and man, are on their way to blessedness. Evil is part of the discipline by which the soul is restored to union with the Over-Soul. The less we have to do with our sins, the better. No man can afford to waste his moments in compunctions." All evil is undeveloped good. This has been well called "the higher synthesis of the Devil and the Deity." If Emerson is not worthy of the title, which Carlyle invented for another, of "President of the Heaven and Hell Amalgamation Society," he certainly can be said to have devised an excuse for all human passion, and a slander upon the holiness of God.

When individual men become mere figureheads and automata for the divine inworking, they cease to be objects of our special regard. Emerson confessed his inability to enter into intimate personal relations with others. His friendships were of the cool intellectual sort; "there were fences between him and his dearest friends"; he was slow to appreciate or to advocate the cause of the slave; he cared for man in the abstract rather than for real men. The only God he knew was within his own soul. Paul declared that all things are ours because we enter into Christ's inheritance; Emerson held that all things are ours by original right, and that Christ enters into our inheritance instead:

I am owner of the sphere,  
Of the seven stars and the solar year,  
Of Cæsar's hand, and Plato's brain,  
Of Lord Christ's heart, and Shakespeare's  
strain."

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" Motto to the " Essay on History."

"In self-trust," he said, "all the virtues are compounded. *Man* has been wronged; *men* are of no account. The human mind cannot be enshrined in a person who shall set a barrier on any one side to this unbounded, unboundable empire." He questions the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount. One must not be hindered by consideration for others. The true end of being is development of the self. This seems dangerously near to Paul's description of "the man of sin," who "sits in the temple of God, setting himself forth as God." It is the "Overman" of Nietzsche, claiming the right to realize self and to put down all that stands in his way. It is the view of Ibsen, who, in "The Doll's House," makes Nora put self-realization before wifehood and motherhood. "Obligation to put all poor men into good situations?" says Emerson. "Are they *my* poor? . . . I grudge the dollar, the dime, the cent, I give to such men as do not belong to me, and to whom I do not belong." The least and lowest of all the sons of men had worth enough for Jesus to make him willing to suffer and die in his behalf. The parable of the Good Samaritan showed who is my neighbor. But the evangelization of men did not interest Emerson. He was greatly amused that the American Baptist Missionary Union attempted the conversion of France; and when asked what he would do with the Hottentots of Africa, he replied, "Just what I would do with one of their ant-hills—step on it." And in his poem "Alphonso" he writes:

Earth, crowded, cries, 'Too many men!'  
My counsel is, Kill nine in ten,

And bestow the shares of all  
On the remnant decimal.

. . . . .  
So shall ye have a man of the sphere,  
Fit to grace the solar year.

And yet, all of Emerson's optimism, his recognition of God in nature, his love of country, his hope for the future, were drawn from Christ. These things were not, before Christ came. It is Christ who has glorified nature and man; it is he who has inspired hope for the individual and for society. The classic writers were pessimists; to them the world seemed given over to evil, and to be nearing destruction. Apocalypticism was only the reflection in religious minds of such fears as possessed Cicero and Seneca. The very dignity of man, which Emerson fancied to be his peculiar message and discovery, was the revelation of Him who thought each human soul of such worth that he died to save it. On this ladder Emerson has climbed to his calm faith in the divine indwelling and in man's certainty of progress. It was blindness and ingratitude in him to throw down the ladder by which he had climbed.

Let us be thankful for the truth he utters, though he is far from uttering the whole truth and nothing but the truth. We owe much to him for his insight into the meaning of nature. There is a spirit in matter; nothing in this world is dead; every leaf and every breeze is symbolic; God speaks to us in the heavens above and in the earth beneath:

Thou canst not wave thy staff in air,  
Or dip thy paddle in the lake,

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But it carves the bow of beauty there,  
 And the ripples in rhymes the oar forsake.  
 The wood is wiser far than thou;  
 The wood and wave each other know  
 Not unrelated, unaffied,  
 But to each thought and thing allied,  
 Is perfect Nature's every part,  
 Rooted in the mighty Heart.

. . . . .  
 Behind thee leave thy merchandise,  
 Thy churches and thy charities;  
 And leave thy peacock wit behind;  
 Enough for thee the primal mind  
 That flows in streams, that breathes in wind;  
 Leave all thy pedant lore apart;  
 God hid the whole world in thy heart.

. . . . .  
 All the forms are fugitive,  
 But the substances survive.  
 Ever fresh the broad creation,  
 A divine improvisation,  
 From the heart of God proceeds,  
 A single will, a million deeds.<sup>28</sup>

There are snatches and bursts of melody in the midst  
 of tame and rambling verse, such as :

Announced by all the trumpets of the sky

. . . . .  
 Come see the north wind's masonry.

. . . . .  
 The frolic architecture of the snow.<sup>29</sup>

For the world was built in order,  
 And the atoms march in tune;  
 Rhyme the pipe, and Time the warder,  
 The sun obeys them and the moon.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> "Woodnotes," II.

<sup>29</sup> "The Snow-storm."

<sup>30</sup> "Monadnoc."

Brother, sweeter is the Law  
Than all the grace Love ever saw;  
We are its suppliants. By it, we  
Draw the breath of Eternity.<sup>21</sup>

For the prevision is allied  
Unto the thing so signified;  
Or say, the foresight that awaits  
Is the same Genius that creates.<sup>22</sup>

The sun set, but set not his hope:—  
Stars rose, his faith was earlier up:  
Fixed on the enormous galaxy,  
Deeper and older seemed his eye,  
And matched his sufferance sublime  
The taciturnity of Time.<sup>23</sup>

'Tis not in the high stars alone,  
Nor in the cup of budding flowers,  
Nor in the redbreast's mellow tone,  
Nor in the bow that smiles in showers,  
But in the mud and scum of things  
There alway, alway something sings.<sup>24</sup>

What Emerson says of Goethe we may well apply  
to himself:

Is he hapless who can spare  
In his plenty things so rare?

With his view that man is immediately inspired by  
God, Emerson may be expected to be an apostle of  
human freedom. And so he is, if we look at man in  
the abstract, for individual men did not seem to him  
so worthy of his notice.

On prince or bride no diamond stone  
Half so gracious ever shone,  
As the light of enterprise  
Beaming from a young man's eyes.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> "The Poet."

<sup>22</sup> "Music."

<sup>23</sup> "Fate."

<sup>24</sup> Translations.

<sup>25</sup> "The Poet."

Ever in the strife of your own thoughts  
 Obey the nobler impulse; that is Rome:  
 That shall command a senate to your side;  
 For there is no might in the universe  
 That can contend with love. It reigns forever.<sup>26</sup>

The hero is not fed on sweets,  
 Daily his own heart he eats;  
 Chambers of the great are jails,  
 And head-winds right for royal sails.<sup>27</sup>

He that feeds men serveth few;  
 He serves all who dares be true.<sup>28</sup>

O tenderly the haughty day  
 Fills his blue urn with fire;  
 One morn is in the mighty heaven,  
 And one in our desire. . .

For He that worketh high and wise,  
 Nor pauses in his plan,  
 Will take the sun out of the skies  
 Ere freedom out of man.<sup>29</sup>

The "Boston Hymn," read in the Music Hall, January  
 1, 1863, is a stirring eulogy of American liberty:

The word of the Lord by night  
 To the watching Pilgrims came,  
 As they sat by the seaside,  
 And filled their hearts with flame.

God said, I am tired of kings,  
 I suffer them no more;  
 Up to my ear the morning brings  
 The outrage of the poor.

. . . . .

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<sup>26</sup> "Written at Rome."

<sup>28</sup> "The Celestial Love."

<sup>27</sup> "Heroism."

<sup>29</sup> "Ode" at Concord.



Come, East and West and North,  
By races, as snow-flakes,  
And carry my purpose forth,  
Which neither halts nor shakes.

My will fulfilled shall be,  
For, in daylight or in dark,  
My thunderbolt has eyes to see  
His way home to the mark.

He wrote an "Inscription for a Well in Memory of the Martyrs of the War":

Fall, stream, from Heaven to bless; return as well;  
So did our sons; Heaven met them as they fell.

Though love repine, and reason chafe,  
There came a voice without reply,—  
'Tis man's perdition to be safe,  
When for the truth he ought to die.\*

But conflict was not our poet's native air. He was no reasoner and no controversialist. It took him a long time to realize that secession and rebellion in our Southern States must be put down. It has sometimes been said that he was never angry, and his unvarying serenity has been used to disparage our Lord's denunciations of Scribes and Pharisees. Such praise is virtual condemnation; for real love for the good is inseparable from indignation against the evil. The true God is not indifferent to moral relations—he is a God of fearful justice, of awful purity, of searching love, and holiness is fundamental in his being. Frothingham, in his "Transcendentalism in New England," intimates that Emerson was not devoid of indignation against wrong, and tells us that he could

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\* "Sacrifice."

imitate Jesus' doom of the barren fig tree. He certainly denounced Daniel Webster and spoke of that "filthy Fugitive Slave Law," which Webster commended to New England. When Sumner was smitten, he said, "I think we must get rid of slavery, or we must get rid of freedom." But such wrath was exceedingly rare. Henry James remarks that Emerson "never caught a glimpse of the cherubim and the flaming sword, but put forth his hand direct to the tree of life." Sweetness and benignity characterized his common demeanor. He moved among men as one whose head was in the clouds, and who was oblivious of the petty jangling and contention of sublunary affairs. He dealt with principles rather than with details, with pure rather than with applied science. "I live wholly from within," he said. John Morley classes him with Rousseau, Robespierre, and Carlyle, as "beginning with sentiment and ignoring reason"; as having "great feeling for right, but also great contempt for the only instruments by which we can make sure what right is." And we may add that Emerson would have been less tranquil, but more useful, if he had recognized an external divine revelation. He saw "no urgent necessity for Heaven's last revelation, since the laws of morality had been written before, and philosophy had lively dreams of immortality." Here we see that our poet conceived of Christianity, not as God's gift of pardon for the violation of law, nor as God's gift of power to obey law, but solely as an ethical philosophy which throws men back upon their own insight and ability—a sorry resource for a convicted sinner.

Did Emerson believe in personal immortality? It is very doubtful. If God is impersonal, and man is to be merged at last in God, the less faith we have in individual existence beyond the grave, the better. Yet, with the mystics, he did not believe in annihilation. "God upholds us with his uncreated power," he says, "and keeps the soul still herself." And some of his interpreters, like Cooke, maintain that he rejects the individual, local, and selfish, but retains the personal, divine, and eternal. One can find in his writings occasional utterances that encourage faith. "Life is not long enough for art, or for friendship," he declares. "The soul does not age with the body." He is "sure that in the other life we will be permitted to finish the work begun in this." But then he also says: "A future state is an illusion for the ever-present state. It is not duration, but a taking of the soul out of time." He believes in the future, only because he has God in the present. But whether we shall know each other beyond the grave is "a school-dame question." Even the "Threnody," which expresses his grief at the death of his beautiful young son, gives us no certain assurance that he ever expected to meet him again. In the shadow of that affliction he wrote to Carlyle: "I dare not fathom the Invisible and Untold, to inquire what relations to my departed ones I yet sustain." He speaks of "the inarticulateness of the Supreme Power," and asks: "How can we insatiate hearers, perceivers, and thinkers, ever reconcile us to it? My divine temple, which all angels seemed to love to build, was shattered in a night." This is surely far short of the comfort which Christ gives to his dis-

ciples, and it shows that in his sorrow our author needed more than any inner light could give him. The "Threnody" is painful reading to one who believes that Christ has brought life and immortality to light in his glorious gospel, and it reminds us of the sad and uncertain inscriptions upon the monuments of the dead in classic times. Listen to these words:

The South-wind brings  
Life, sunshine and desire,  
And on every mount and meadow  
Breathes aromatic fire;  
But over the dead he has no power,  
The lost, the lost, he cannot restore;  
And, looking over the hills, I mourn  
The darling who shall not return.

. . . . .

Not mine,—I never called thee mine,  
But Nature's heir,—if I repine,  
And seeing rashly torn and moved  
Not what I made, but what I loved,  
Grow early old with grief that thou  
Must to the wastes of Nature go,—  
'Tis because a general hope  
Was quenched, and all must doubt and grope.

. . . . .

*What is excellent,  
As God lives, is permanent;  
Hearts are dust, hearts' loves remain;  
Heart's love will meet thee again.*  
Revere the Maker; fetch thine eye  
Up to his style, and manners of the sky.

. . . . .

Silent rushes the swift Lord  
Through ruined systems still restored,  
Broadsowing, bleak and void to bless,  
Plants with worlds the wilderness;

Waters with tears of ancient sorrow  
Apples of Eden ripe to-morrow.  
House and tenant go to ground,  
Lost in God, in Godhead found.

Schleiermacher's touching address at the funeral of his only son furnishes a remarkable parallel to this poem. They both exhibit a calm confidence that all is well, without certainty of future reunion. So far as Emerson was concerned, Jesus might never have lived, and might never have opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers. He would have been content, he said, "to be a good Roman in the days of Cicero. I burn after the '*aliquid immensum infinitumque*' which Cicero desired." Like Marcus Aurelius, he had the self-repression and the self-assertion of the Stoic. Calm and benignant, a New England Brahmin, living in an upper air of thought, he had no eye for the tragedy of the world and for its need of redemption. He moved among men with something of Goethe's majestic composure. Doctor Holmes tells us that he was fully six feet in height, but spare in build and weighing only one hundred and forty pounds. Blue eyes, brown hair, sloping shoulders, all marked him for an idealist. He had no ear for music, never indulged in loud laughing, was no mathematician or mechanic. The seeing eye was his, as he himself said, but not the working hand. He was never hungry, though he always had pie for breakfast, and only replied to Oliver Wendell Holmes's remonstrance with the naïve question, "Why, what is pie for?" He rose at seven, drank coffee and tea, and took to his bed at ten in the evening. He complained of his

own debility, procrastination, and inefficiency; yet he was instant in season and out of season at his work of reading, thinking, and writing; so that the amount of his literary product, though small in poetry, is in prose extraordinarily large.

Emerson was not only sincere in his thinking—he was also honest in his utterances. The condensation and pithiness of every sentence in his conversation and in his writing were the fruit of much pondering of phrase. “To give the thought just and full expression,” he says, “I must not prematurely utter it. It is as if you let the spring snap too soon.” We know what is meant by “going off at half-cock.” There was something attractive and impressive in his frequent waiting for the proper word, and in his triumphant seizure of that word when it came to mind. This painstaking, however, became too much of a habit, and it led to paralysis. In his latter days he was afflicted with great loss of memory. First the names of persons, and then the names of the most familiar things, passed from him. But this affliction seemed never to disturb his tranquillity. He smiled at himself; took the needed word from others, went on in perfect composure. It was affecting to see him at the funeral of Longfellow. He paid respect by his presence to one of his lifelong friends, a poet like himself, and one more widely popular. At the close of the service he turned to his companion and said: “The gentleman whose funeral we have been attending was a sweet and beautiful soul, but—I have forgotten his name.” And in less than a twelvemonth Emerson had followed Longfellow.

He was what he was, and we must value the good, even while we deprecate the evil. He grasped one of the greatest truths, and that one truth gave him a resting-place and fortress from which he could look out calmly upon the world. As years increased, he could write:

Spring still makes spring in the mind  
When sixty years are told;  
Love wakes anew this throbbing heart,  
And we are never old;  
Over the winter glaciers  
I see the summer glow,  
And through the wild-piled snow-drift,  
The warm rosebuds below.<sup>41</sup>

Good-bye, proud world! I'm going home:  
Thou art not my friend, and I'm not thine.  
Long through thy weary crowds I roam;  
A river-ark on the ocean brine,  
Long I've been tossed like the driven foam;  
But now, proud world! I'm going home.<sup>42</sup>

When frail Nature can no more,  
Then the Spirit strikes the hour;  
My servant Death, with solving rite,  
Pours finite into infinite.<sup>43</sup>

And in all literature there are few anticipations of death more composed and stalwart than Emerson's poem entitled "Terminus":

It is time to be old,  
To take in sail:—  
The god of bounds,  
Who sets to seas a shore,  
Came to me in his fatal rounds,  
And said, 'No more!

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<sup>41</sup> "The World-Soul."

<sup>42</sup> "Good-bye."

<sup>43</sup> "Threnody."

No farther shoot  
 Thy broad ambitious branches, and thy root.  
 Fancy departs: no more invent;  
 Contract thy firmament  
 To compass of a tent.'

. . . . .

As the bird trims her to the gale,  
 I trim myself to the storm of time,  
 I man the rudder, reef the sail,  
 Obey the voice at eve obeyed at prime:  
 'Lowly faithful, banish fear,  
 Right onward drive unharmed;  
 The port, well worth the cruise, is near,  
 And every wave is charmed.'

This is beautiful and impressive; but it gives no ground for trust to a sinner. The apostle has a better hope; knows whom he has believed; and is persuaded that he will keep that which he has committed to him against the great inevitable day. Aye, more than this, he has a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better.

Ralph Waldo Emerson was a monist. He held that there is but one substance, ground, or principle of being, namely, God. Scripture asserts this doctrine, when it teaches the divine omnipresence and immanence. If Emerson had taught only this, he might have been of unqualified benefit to his generation. But Scripture teaches other truths which qualify this—I mean the truth of God's transcendence and personality, and the truth of man's distinct personality as reflecting the personality of God. There are two sorts of monism—an ethical monism which recognizes these ethical facts in God and in man, and a non-ethical monism which ignores or denies them. It was a non-ethical monism



to which Emerson held. Deity so absorbed humanity that there was little room left for freedom, or responsibility, or sin, or guilt, or atonement, or retribution. Unitarianism demonstrated its logical insufficiency by its lapse from ethical standards. The high Arianism of Channing degenerated into the half-fledged pantheism of Emerson. While we recognize the great truth which Emerson proclaimed—the truth of metaphysical monism, or the doctrine of one substance, principle, or ground of being—we must also insist on the complementary truth which he ignored or denied—the truth of psychological dualism, or the doctrine that man's soul is personally distinct from matter on the one hand, and from God on the other.

Emerson did not regard himself as a pantheist. He cared little for names. He was bent only upon seizing whatever truth there was in pantheism, while he still held to the essentials of theism. But he was unconsciously influenced by naturalistic prepossessions, and he did not sufficiently realize that nature must be interpreted by man, and not man by nature. The God that nature gave him was a God devoid of moral attributes, a God who was author of evil as well as of good, a God who manifested himself only in law, a God who could hold no personal intercourse with his creatures, a God incapable of revelation or redemption. Man is thrown back upon his own powers. The only God he knows is in his own soul. An exaggerated self-appreciation takes the place of worship; natural impulse becomes the only authority; self-realization is the only end. Thus a non-ethical monism is ultimate deification of self, and Emerson is "the friend and

aider of those who would live in the spirit," not in the sense of leading them to receive and obey the Spirit of God, but by blinding them to the truth and giving them over to the spirit of evil.

In his early days Emerson quoted with approbation our Saviour's words, "If ye do my Father's will, ye shall know of the doctrine." It was not an exact quotation, but it had awakened a responsive emotion in his heart. We are led to wonder what Emerson's influence would have been, if he had heeded that admonition and had yielded his allegiance to him whom God has sent to reveal and to save. That matchless gift of fresh and incisive utterance might then have been used in winning men to Christ, whereas it has often drawn men away from him; it might have led men through Christ to God, whereas it has often held before them a vague abstraction which eludes while it attracts. The God of the pantheist is no God for the ignorant or the sinful or the dying. In so far as he taught men of a present God in nature and in history, we can apply to him the words of Christ, "He that is not against us is for us." But in so far as he ignored and denied Christ's deity and atonement and authority, Dr. William Hague's judgment upon Emerson must be ours—a judgment all the more fitting because it repeats the words of Christ himself: "He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad."

Emerson died on the twenty-seventh day of April, 1882. Cabot tells us, very simply and beautifully, that on the following Sunday, April the thirtieth, in Sleepy Hollow, a grove consecrated as a burial-place on the

edge of the village of Concord, and at the foot of a tall pine tree upon the top of the ridge in the highest part of the grounds, Emerson's body was laid, not far from the graves of Hawthorne and of Thoreau, and surrounded by those of his kindred. His mortal remains rest in the Cathedral of Nature, whose life he strove to absorb and to interpret; and since he uttered at least some truth of value to his generation and to the world, we may still say:

Speak no more of his renown,  
Lay your earthly fancies down,  
And in the vast cathedral leave him,  
God accept him, Christ receive him!



**III**

**JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER**



## JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER

### I

OF all our American poets, Whittier is the most American. He is no exotic. Emerson, Holmes, Lowell, and even Bryant, with all their effort to escape from foreign standards, were unconsciously influenced by classical or by English literature. Whittier was rooted more deeply than they in the New England soil, drew his sustenance from men rather than from books, and bore genuinely native fruits of sincerity and freedom. Like Robert Burns, who first kindled in him the ambition to be a poet, he was too poor to go to college. But poverty and hardship gave him sympathy with all sufferers, and made his verse the unsophisticated expression of common human needs and aspirations. His religious nature recognized in all its impulses, not so much the Over-Soul that thinks, as the Over-Heart that throbs, in all humanity; and this reference of the inner light to its personal divine source consecrated his poetry. If Burns was the national lyrist of Scotland, then Whittier is the national lyrist of America. His is a homespun verse, but it is the utterance of a patriot and a prophet, even more truly than was the poetry of Burns. It is profoundly and pervasively religious. His political poems are half-battles, because

they are half-prayers. And the spirit of them is that which he celebrates in his "Prophecy of Sam Sewall":

Praise and thanks for an honest man!—  
Glory to God for the Puritan!

Whittier was a Quaker, and Quakerism was Puritanism carried to its logical extreme. The Puritan renounced allegiance to the papacy, and had asserted his right of immediate access to God, without intervention of priest or sacrament. But he put Scripture the place of the church, as the infallible rule of faith and practice, and this semi-deification of external authority led to deadness of feeling. George Fox revolted from the formalism into which the church had sunk. He trembled and quaked in the felt presence of the living God. He found One, "even Christ Jesus, who could speak to his condition." He uncovered anew the spirituality of true religion, longed to impart this discovery to others. He began a public ministry, going through England on foot at his own charges, that the people "might see Christ Jesus."

This was the beginning of Quakerism. Fox denied the authority of Scripture, but he put the testimony of the Holy Spirit side by side with Scripture as its supplement and interpreter. Bartholomew of the sect, declared that "Whatsoever do, pretending to the Spirit, which is contrary to the Scriptures, should be accounted and reckoned a delusion of the Devil." There were, however, from that day, members of the Society who so



the importance of their personal experience as to make the inner light modify and even supersede the outward and written revelation. The Hicksite party in America was only a recrudescence of that early tendency. As they could deny the special inspiration of Scripture, they could also substitute Christ in the heart for the historic Christ, and the very foundations of Christian faith gave way. John Greenleaf Whittier never favored these aberrations of doctrine. He was to the last an Orthodox Quaker, holding the Scriptures to be "*a* rule, not *the* rule of faith and practice, which is none other than the omnipresent Spirit of God—a subordinate, secondary, and declaratory rule—they testify of Christ within."<sup>1</sup> And at his eightieth anniversary he read the lines:

Scotland shall flourish while each peasant learns  
The psalms of David and songs of Burns.

The inner promptings of the spirit, independent of book or reason, are an uncertain indication of duty, and a frail support in sorrow. The inner light, so far as it is trustworthy, has its source outside of itself, and is to be tested and corrected by God's external revelation. We are to "try the spirits, whether they be from God." As all the light of day comes from the sun, so all the light of conscience comes from Christ, "the Light that lighteth every man." And faith is the eye which receives his light and purifies the light within. Whittier was a believer in Christ. He also believed in an immediate influence of the Holy Spirit. "Something outside of myself speaks to me and holds me to

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<sup>1</sup> Letter to Richard Nott, 1840.



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duty, warns, reproves, and approves—a revelation of God.” So he writes. But this mysticism is corrected by recognizing the inspiration and authority of Scripture, and the oneness of the Christ within with the historic Christ who suffered and died on Calvary.

It is no wonder that eccentricities of Quaker doctrine brought down upon many members of the Society the strong arm of the law. When they were moved to interrupt the worship of the churches by their denunciations, and to defy the authorities by parading naked through the streets, the inner light seemed only another name for insanity. In England and in America alike, they were imprisoned and exiled. Mary Dyer and three male Friends were hanged on Boston Common, and female members of the sect were stripped to the waist, whipped unmercifully, and driven out into the wilderness. To shelter them was a crime. Doctor Ellis claimed that the Quakers were as much to blame for being hanged as the Puritans were for hanging them. But Whittier indignantly replied that Puritan intolerance had turned the heads of unoffending Christians, and had compelled them to their strange methods of testimony:

“God is our witness,” the victims cried,  
“We suffer for Him who for all men died;  
The wrong ye do has been done before,  
We bear the stripes that the Master bore!”\*

The founder of the Whittier family in New England was Thomas Whittier, who came to this country in 1638. He was not himself a Quaker, though he knew

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\* “How the Women Went from Dover.”

of George Fox and sympathized with his doctrine. Haverhill, thirty miles north of Boston, was then an outpost of civilization, with a hundred miles of wilderness and roving bands of Indians beyond it. Here, in its East Parish, and in a beautiful bend of the Merrimac, though out of sight to any other settler, Thomas Whittier made his home and reared a stalwart family of five sons and five daughters. His grandson Joseph married a Greenleaf, of probably Huguenot descent, since the name seems to be the French *Feuillevert* Anglicized. Our poet was the grandson of this grandson. His father was a devout member of the Society of Friends, and his mother one of the loveliest and saintliest of women. In her veins was the blood of Stephen Bachiler, an English Nonconformist and an Oxford man, who had come to America to avoid persecution. Bachiler's daughter Susannah was the grandmother of Daniel Webster, so that John Greenleaf Whittier and Daniel Webster were cousins.

It must be remembered that the Friends were men of peace. They asked only the privilege of worshiping God according to the dictates of their own consciences. It was the same right which the Puritans claimed for themselves. But the Puritans denied it to others, and there grew up in Massachusetts an autocracy and a hierarchy as intolerant and cruel as that from which Quakers and Huguenots had fled across the sea. Our poet grew up in an atmosphere of intense indignation against this intolerance, while at the same time the spirit of revolt was held in check by the principles of peace, and by the faith that God would in due time

vindicate the right. On the nineteenth of October, 1658, the General Court of Massachusetts enacted that "any person or persons of the cursed sect of Quakers" should, on conviction of the same, be banished, on pain of death, from the jurisdiction of the commonwealth. On a painting by Abbey commemorating this decree Whittier wrote his poem entitled "Banished from Massachusetts":

The Muse of history yet shall make amends  
To those who freedom, peace, and justice taught,  
Beyond their dark age led the van of thought,  
And left unforfeited the name of Friends.

We must remember that Quakers called themselves "Friends," not primarily because they were friends to one another or to mankind, but because, like Abraham, they were conscious of being the chosen friends of God, and of living in fellowship with him. In "The Pennsylvania Pilgrim," Whittier has given us a vivid description of Quaker life and doctrine:

Gathered from many sects, the Quaker brought  
His old beliefs, adjusting to the thought  
That moved his soul the creed his fathers taught.

One faith alone, so broad that all mankind  
Within themselves its secret witness find,  
The soul's communion with the Eternal Mind,

The Spirit's law, the Inward Rule and Guide,  
Scholar and peasant, lord and serf, allied,  
The polished Penn and Cromwell's Ironside.

The Light of Life shone round him; one by one  
The wandering lights, that all-misleading run,  
Went out like candles paling in the sun.

That Light he followed, step by step, where'er  
It led, as in the vision of the seer  
The wheels moved as the spirit in the clear

And terrible crystal moved, with all their eyes  
Watching the living splendor sink or rise,  
Its will their will, knowing no otherwise.

Within himself he found the law of right,  
He walked by faith and not the letter's sight,  
And read his Bible by the Inward Light.

His was the Christian's unsung Age of Gold,  
A truer idyl than the bards have told  
Of Arno's banks or Arcady of old.

Whittier was a birthright member of the Society. He gloried in his ancestry, adhered to their sober dress, used the "thee" and "thou" of their traditional speech. He attended Quaker meetings, though he seldom or never spoke in them; his only criticism upon these meetings was indeed that "there was too much speaking in them." He would not by his presence countenance the marriage of a Quaker to one outside of the Society, though he did send a poem to the married pair. He was never in a theater or a circus. When member of the legislature, he would take no oath, nor address the chair. He would not wear crape, nor use the ordinary dates. He owned no master but the Lord. He hated priests and kings, and abhorred the Puritan theocracy. But his independence was quiet and unresisting, though his mother and his aunt melted the wax figure of a clergyman that his soul might go to its doom in hell. In the days when Puseyism was rife, he wrote: "Has thee noticed the general tendency toward the old trust in man—in priests and sacrifices,

in ghostly mummary and machinery? To me it seems to bid fair to swallow up everything but Quakerism of the old stamp—rejection of *all* ceremonial, total disbelief in the power of pope, priest, or elder to give a ransom for the soul of another.”

The Quaker of the olden time!  
How calm and firm and true,  
Unspotted by its wrong and crime,  
He walked the dark earth through.

He walked by faith and not by sight,  
By love and not by law;  
The presence of the wrong or right  
He rather felt than saw.

And, pausing not for doubtful choice  
Of evils great or small,  
He listened to that inward voice  
Which called away from all.

O Spirit of that early day,  
So pure and strong and true,  
Be with us in the narrow way  
Our faithful fathers knew.  
Give strength the evil to forsake,  
The cross of Truth to bear,  
And love and reverent fear to make  
Our daily lives a prayer.<sup>3</sup>

Whittier was indeed a Quaker of the olden time. The inner light upon which he depended was a very different light from that which was recognized by Emerson. Emerson's light was the light of nature; Whittier's was the light of Christ. Emerson regarded the fixed successions of the physical world as the

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<sup>3</sup> “The Quaker of the Olden Time.”

primitive reality; Whittier thought conscience and heart of more importance than all the paraphernalia of planets and of suns. Emerson was influenced by the materialistic philosophy of the English deists, and by the Unitarian reaction from the older Calvinistic theology; Whittier drew his inspiration and his doctrine from deep personal experience of sin and of redemption, and from sympathetic observation of the sorrow and guilt of humanity. In short, Emerson began with nature; Whittier began with man. Emerson interpreted man by nature; Whittier interpreted nature by man. For this reason there is a prevailing ethical element in Whittier's poetry, which Emerson's almost wholly lacks; the keynote of Whittier's is compassion, while that of Emerson is speculation; Emerson's intuitions are the uncertain utterances of his own imperfect moral being; Whittier's inner light is that of an indwelling and personal God.

The poet was born and not made. Yet his surroundings had much to do with the unfolding of his genius. The handsome Quaker lad was five feet ten and a half inches tall when he was only fifteen years of age. But life on the Haverhill farm was one of solitude and privation. There were no doors to the barns, and no flannels or overcoats for men; no buffalorobes for driving, and no fires in the meeting-house. The milking of seven cows daily, and the threshing of wheat with the flail, overtaxed the boy's strength, and left him a lifelong prey to heart-disease and to insomnia. It was a rocky and swampy farm. Exposure induced bronchitis. Ill-cooked food gave him the dyspepsia. Yet he learned to read at home; and the

Bible, "Pilgrim's Progress," and a stray Waverley novel devoured in secret, wakened in him an intense love of literature. "I well remember," he writes, "how, at a very early age, the solemn organ-roll of Gray's 'Elegy' and the lyric sweep and pathos of Cowper's 'Lament for the Royal George' moved and fascinated me, with a sense of mystery and power felt rather than understood." His first verses were apparently written on the woodwork of his mother's loom; later efforts he committed to a slate; and finally he aspired to an album. His reminiscences of childhood are peculiarly touching. Who can mistake the truth of his picture of "The Barefoot Boy"?

Blessings on thee, little man,  
Barefoot boy, with cheek of tan!  
With thy turned-up pantaloons,  
And thy merry whistled tunes;  
With thy red lip, redder still  
Kissed by strawberries on the hill;  
With the sunshine on thy face,  
Through thy torn brim's jaunty grace;  
From my heart I give thee joy,—  
I was once a barefoot boy!

And that same barefoot boy we see depicted as a scholar, in his lines "To My Old Schoolmaster":

I, the urchin unto whom,  
In that smoked and dingy room,  
Where the district gave thee rule  
O'er its ragged winter school,  
Thou didst teach the mysteries  
Of those weary A B C's,—  
Where, to fill the every pause  
Of thy wise and learned saws,  
Through the cracked and crazy wall



Came the cradle-rock and squall,  
And the goodman's voice, at strife  
With his shrill and tipsy wife.

It was one of his crude early poems, "The Exile's Departure," which attracted the attention of William Lloyd Garrison, and led ultimately to their partnership in the work of reform. Without Whittier's knowledge, his sister had sent to the "Free Press" of Newburyport the manuscript of that poem. Garrison was but little older than Whittier; but, with larger knowledge of the world and of literature, he recognized the promise of its author, and made a journey of fourteen miles to greet him. The father was besought to give his son an education, but at first refused, upon the ground that poetry would not give him bread. His scruples were overruled when the boy learned to make shoes for twenty-five cents the pair and sold them to pay his schooling. So Whittier had two years in the Haverhill Academy. They were years of wide reading and of constant literary production, both in prose and in verse. Most of his early work indeed was journalistic. His poetry was thrown off hastily to express some fleeting impulse or to meet some public need. Whittier was a natural editor. Each new event was to him a challenge, and he discussed it in print. It was soon apparent that he had political insight, knowledge of motives, and power to direct public opinion. In his "Tent on the Beach" he describes himself:

And one there was, a dreamer born,  
Who, with a mission to fulfil,  
Had left the Muses' haunts to turn  
The crank of an opinion-mill,

Making his rustic reed of song  
A weapon in the war with wrong,  
Yoking his fancy to the breaking-plough  
That beam-deep turned the soil for truth to spring  
and grow.

Too quiet seemed the man to ride  
The winged Hippogriff Reform;  
Was his a voice from side to side  
To pierce the tumult of the storm?  
A silent, shy, peace-loving man,  
He seemed no fiery partisan  
To hold his way against the public frown,  
The ban of Church and State, the fierce mob's  
hounding down.

For while he wrought with strenuous will  
The work his hands had found to do,  
He heard the fitful music still  
Of winds that out of dreamland blew.  
The din about him could not drown  
What the strange voices whispered down;  
Along his task-field weird processions swept,  
The visionary pomp of stately phantoms stepped.

He had not yet found himself. But vague premonitions of coming power and reputation were there to tempt and to attract. In "Moll Pitcher" there was originally a closing stanza, which the poet subsequently suppressed:

Land of my fathers!—if my name,  
Now humble and unwed to fame,  
Hereafter burn upon the lip  
As one of those which may not die,  
Linked in eternal fellowship  
With visions pure and strong and high—  
If the wild dreams, which quicken now  
The throbbing pulse of heart and brow,  
Hereafter take a real form

Like specters changed to being warm;  
And over temples worn and gray  
The starlike crown of glory shine,—  
Thine be the bard's undying lay,  
The murmur of his praise be thine!

And now we come to the turning-point of Whittier's life, to what we must regard as a genuine conversion. Hitherto he had lived with no definite aim beyond his own development and success. Local incidents and legends had furnished subjects for his poems. Political advancement had seemed possible, and he had thought seriously of running for Congress. He was a brilliant editor, and he had formed literary acquaintances of value. He longed to escape from the monotony of farm life, and to make himself felt in public affairs. Then came the anti-slavery agitation and the call of God to espouse the cause of freedom. Garrison summoned him to join the abolitionists. It was like joining the anarchists of to-day. We must remember that cotton-growing at the South had made slave-labor profitable and apparently necessary. Northern capital was invested in commerce and manufactures which depended on Southern trade. The early acknowledgment of the injustice of slavery was replaced by a defense of the system. Even the Quakers were sometimes unwilling to permit anti-slavery discussion in their conferences. The whole weight of social, literary, and political influence was on the side of the oppressor. To be an abolitionist was to expose oneself to contempt and ostracism, if not to the violence of the mob. When Garrison sent his ringing appeal to Whittier, acceptance of his invitation meant for our poet the

giving up of all his earthly prospects and consigning himself to lifelong poverty and disgrace. The lines which he addressed to Charles Sumner apply quite as well to himself:

God said: "Break thou these yokes! undo  
These heavy burdens! I ordain  
A work to last thy whole life through,  
A ministry of strife and pain.

"Forego thy dreams of lettered ease,  
Put thou the scholar's promise by,  
The rights of man are more than these."  
He heard and answered: "Here am I!"

Garrison's declaration of principles in the first number of "The Liberator" was as bold as the "Theses" which Luther nailed to the door of the church in Wittenberg: "Unconditional emancipation is the immediate duty of the master, and the immediate right of the slave. . . I will be as harsh as truth, as uncompromising as justice; I am in earnest, I will not equivocate, I will not excuse, I will not retreat a single inch, and I will be heard." And Whittier responded to Garrison's appeal:

My heart hath leaped to answer thine,  
And echo back thy words,  
As leaps the warrior's at the shine  
And flash of kindred swords!

It was no mere burst of youthful enthusiasm, but a heroic consecration to duty. For the thirtieth anniversary of the Anti-slavery Society he wrote: "I am thankful to divine Providence that turned me so early away from what Roger Williams calls 'the world's great Trinity—pleasure, profit, and honor,'—to take

side with the poor and oppressed. I am not insensible to literary reputation; I love, perhaps too well, the praise and good will of my fellow men; but I set a higher value to my name as appended to the Anti-slavery Declaration of 1833, than on the title-page of any book.” And to a boy seeking counsel in after years he said: “ My lad, if thou wouldst win success, join thyself to some unpopular but noble cause.”

This enlistment of Whittier was immediately followed by service. He printed at his own charges a pamphlet entitled “ Justice and Expediency,” in which the whole question of slavery was calmly and learnedly considered. Then too began that long succession of fiery and thrilling appeals to the conscience and heart of the North, which made him, more than all other poets combined, a representative of freedom and a power to nerve our people to defend the Union in its struggle with the slaveholding aristocracy:

Our fellow-countrymen in chains!  
 Slaves, in a land of light and law!  
 Slaves, crouching on the very plains  
 Where rolled the storm of Freedom's war!

What ho! our countrymen in chains!  
 The whip on woman's shrinking flesh!  
 Our soil yet reddening with the stains  
 Caught from her scourging, warm and fresh!  
 What! mothers from their children riven!  
 What! God's own image bought and sold!  
 Americans to market driven,  
 And bartered as the brute for gold!

So read his poem, “ Expostulation.” He paid the penalty. Poetry in those days was no selling com-

modity. With his mother and sister he lived on little more than five hundred dollars a year—the salary of his editorship. He gave up all thought of marriage, though there is abundant evidence that he longed for wedded companionship. Ill health shut him out from public gatherings and from regular city life. When he did venture into the field, it was to visit Garrison in the Philadelphia jail where he was confined for calling a slave-dealer a pirate, or to see that same Garrison dragged through the streets of Boston with a rope around his neck. The mob broke the windows of the Haverhill church, where Whittier attended an anti-slavery meeting, and he was pelted with stones and rotten eggs in Concord. But he says well:

The burden of a prophet's power  
Fell on me in that fearful hour.<sup>4</sup>

Forsaking poetry for humanity, he made both poetry and humanity his own. Now first his art became cosmopolitan and commanding. Losing his life for Christ's sake, he found it.

At the age of twenty-five Whittier was called "a gay young Quaker," though he had "kept his innocence." His gaiety was the expression of a sensitive and kindly nature. But it was accompanied by a deep indignation against impurity and wrong-doing. "Quaker?" was the reply to one who pointed him out; "*he* will fight!" He certainly had fighting blood in his veins, and he explained this by his inheritance from a Norman ancestry. Gail Hamilton worked for him

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<sup>4</sup> "Ezekiel."

a pair of slippers with the effigy of an eagle whose claws grasped thunderbolts. Whittier told her that she was as sharp with her needle as she was with her pen. When it came to the question of our dealings with slavery, it was hard for him to repress his belligerent instincts. Yet his peace principles made him a non-resistant. He admired John Brown, but he disapproved of his methods. He refused to accept a pike which was sent him as a memento of John Brown's raid, saying, "It is not a Christian weapon: it looks too much like murder." Though his poetry had done much to infuse the fighting spirit into others, he would have let the Southern States go, rather than subdue them by force of arms. He would have paid slaveholders for their slaves, but he scorned to catch their fugitives. When our Civil War broke out, he looked on in sorrow, and waited for God to determine the result. Yet his sympathies were all with our Union army, and he could not hide from himself the conviction that in some great crises of history war is inevitable. His poem entitled "Italy," indeed, makes it plain that war is sometimes God's messenger:

I know the pent fire heaves its crust,  
That sultry skies the bolt will form  
To smite them clear; that Nature must  
The balance of her powers adjust,  
Though with the earthquake and the storm.

God reigns, and let the earth rejoice!  
I bow before His sterner plan.  
Dumb are the organs of my choice;  
He speaks in battle's stormy voice,  
His praise is in the wrath of man!

Whittier was more sane and practical than Garrison. He was more unselfish, and he had more of tact and skill. Garrison was dictatorial, and unwilling to take any subordinate position. Whittier was willing to humble himself for the sake of the cause. Was the Bible against anti-slavery? then Garrison declared the Bible to be wrong; did the church oppose? then the church must be reformed; did the Constitution forbid? then the Constitution must be destroyed; was the Union impossible with slavery abolished? then death to the Union! Garrison called the Constitution "a covenant with death, and an agreement with hell," and he demanded that it be immediately annulled. He would not vote, and he renounced all allegiance to a government which was in league with slavery. Whittier, on the other hand, yielded in smaller matters, that he might win in the greater. He remained a voting Quaker. So there ensued a division between these friends, which lasted for years and which greatly intensified Whittier's loneliness and suffering. Yet reconciliation came at last, and each respected the independence of the other. Each had struck his honest blow, and slavery was no more. Whittier nobly commemorates Garrison's service in the verses written after his death:

The storm and peril overpast,  
The hounding hatred shamed and still,  
Go, soul of freedom! take at last  
The place which thou alone canst fill.

Confirm the lesson taught of old—  
Life saved for self is lost, while they  
Who lose it in His service hold  
The lease of God's eternal day.



" Forget, forgive, and unite," were the words of wisdom written by our poet to the meeting held by his fellow townsmen to consider the outrage done to Charles Sumner in the Senate Chamber of the United States. That advice represents the spirit of Whittier's life. Garrison held that " it is a waste of politeness to be courteous to the Devil." Whittier would, by fair means, make even the Evil One to serve the cause of righteousness. He was a good politician, and an expert lobbyist. His influence was both courted and feared, for he could not only warn but rebuke. Caleb Cushing met defeat when he failed to take Whittier's advice and resist the aggressions of slavery. And in all literature there is no more scathing fulmination than his " Ichabod," when Daniel Webster turned his back upon his patriotic past and strove to curry favor with the South by crowding upon the North the infamous Fugitive Slave Law :

So fallen! so lost! the light withdrawn  
Which once he wore!  
The glory from his gray hairs gone  
Forevermore!

Reville him not, the Tempter hath  
A snare for all;  
And pitying tears, not scorn and wrath,  
Befit his fall!

Oh, dumb be passion's stormy rage,  
When he who might  
Have lighted up and led his age  
Falls back in night.

Scorn! would the angels laugh to mark  
A bright soul driven,  
Fiend-goaded, down the endless dark,  
From hope and heaven!

Let not the land once proud of him  
 Insult him now,  
 Nor brand with deeper shame his dim,  
 Dishonored brow.

But let its humbled sons, instead,  
 From sea to lake,  
 A long lament, as for the dead,  
 In sadness make.

Of all we loved and honored, naught  
 Save power remains;  
 A fallen angel's pride of thought,  
 Still strong in chains.

All else is gone; from those great eyes  
 The soul has fled:  
 When faith is lost, when honor dies,  
 The man is dead!

Then, pay the reverence of old days  
 To his dead fame;  
 Walk backward, with averted gaze,  
 And hide the shame!

But when the great man strove to drown remorse in  
 deep potations, lost his hold upon the country and  
 upon himself, and died despondent, Whittier's heart  
 went out toward him in compassion, and he wrote  
 " The Lost Occasion " :

Some die too late and some too soon,  
 At early morning, heat of noon,  
 Or the chill of evening twilight. Thou,  
 Whom the rich heavens did so endow  
 With eyes of power and Jove's own brow,  
 With all the massive strength that fills  
 Thy home-horizon's granite hills,

. . . . .

Thou, foiled in aim and hope, bereaved  
 Of old friends, by the new deceived,  
 Too soon for us, too soon for thee,  
 Beside thy lonely Northern sea,  
 Where long and low the marsh-lands spread,  
 Laid wearily down thy august head.

Thou shouldst have lived to feel below  
 Thy feet Disunion's fierce upthrow;  
 The late-sprung mine that underlaid  
 Thy sad concessions vainly made.

. . . . .

No stronger voice than thine had then  
 Called out the utmost might of men,  
 To make the Union's charter free  
 And strengthen law by liberty.

. . . . .

Ah, cruel fate, that closed to thee

. . . . .

The gates of opportunity!

Poe and Lanier devoted themselves to the mechanism of verse. Art did more for them than nature. Whittier thought more of substance than of form. He had many defects of ear and of training. His hearing was imperfect, and he was color-blind. His early poems were little more than jingling commonplace. He became conscious of their imperfections. He said facetiously that he would like to drown many of them like so many unlikely kittens, and as for "Mogg Megone," he would like to kill him over again, for he now suggested to him "a big Indian in his war-paint, strutting about in Sir Walter Scott's plaid." This judgment was very just. Stedman says well that only what was written after the year 1860 has won a

national reputation. Before that time his writing was hasty and aimed at immediate effect. Faults of rhyme were frequent and glaring. But practice and reading proved to be an education. After the stress of anti-slavery agitation was over, he became connected with the "Atlantic Monthly," and accepted the criticisms of its editors. "I hope," he writes to them, "I am correcting a little of the bad grammar and rhythmical blunders which have so long annoyed Harvard graduates." And the quality of his verse greatly improved in his later years. Its simplicity and intensity commended it to common people. "Snow-Bound" and "The Tent on the Beach" were accepted by thousands as the most characteristic poems that our country had yet produced. And from the time of their publication Whittier was free from financial care. "Snow-Bound" gave him ten thousand dollars for its first edition. Of "The Tent on the Beach" twenty thousand copies were sold. The poet could not understand his own success. "The swindle is awful," he writes; "Barnum is a saint to me. I am bowed down with a sense of guilt, ashamed to look an honest man in the face." But the "Proem," which he wrote to introduce the first general collection of his poems, expresses more seriously and faultlessly the feeling with which he welcomed the first signs of public favor and the first evidence that his work had real value:

I love the old melodious lays  
Which softly melt the ages through,  
The songs of Spenser's golden days,  
Arcadian Sidney's silvery phrase,  
Sprinkling our noon of time with freshest  
morning dew.

Yet, vainly in my quiet hours  
 To breathe their marvelous notes I try;  
 I feel them, as the leaves and flowers  
 In silence feel the dewy showers,  
 And drink with glad, still lips the blessing of  
 the sky.

The rigor of a frozen clime,  
 The harshness of an untaught ear,  
 The jarring words of one whose rhyme  
 Beat often Labor's hurried time,  
 Or Duty's rugged march through storm and  
 strife, are here.

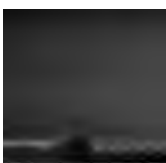
Yet here at least an earnest sense  
 Of human right and weal is shown;  
 A hate of tyranny intense,  
 And hearty in its vehemence,  
 As if my brother's pain and sorrow were my own.

O Freedom! if to me belong  
 Nor mighty Milton's gift divine,  
 Nor Marvell's wit and graceful song,  
 Still with a love as deep and strong  
 As theirs, I lay, like them, my best gifts on  
 thy shrine!

"Upon the occasion of my seventieth birthday, in 1877," he writes:

I was the recipient of many tokens of esteem. The publishers of the "Atlantic Monthly" gave a dinner in my name, and the editor of "The Literary World" gathered in his paper many affectionate messages from my associates in literature and the cause of human progress. The lines which follow were written in acknowledgment.


Beside that milestone where the level sun,  
 Nigh unto setting, sheds his last, low rays  
 On word and work irrevocably done,  
 Life's blending threads of good and ill outspun,  
 I hear, O friends! your words of cheer and praise,



Half doubtful if myself or otherwise.  
Like him who, in the old Arabian joke,  
A beggar slept and crown'd Caliph woke.  
Thanks not the less. With not unglad surprise  
I see my life-work through your partial eyes;  
Assured, in giving to my home-taught songs  
A higher value than of right belongs,  
You do but read between the written lines  
The finer grace of unfulfilled designs.

## II

Religion is the foundation of theology, and, without heart, intellect will go astray. Whittier was a deeply religious man. His poetry had always a religious motive. But the religious element in it does not always take doctrinal form; to discover it we must sometimes look beneath the surface. It is well that we have his prose to interpret his poetry. His "Life and Letters," edited by Samuel T. Picard, furnishes an admirable commentary upon his verse, and enables us to a large extent to understand his theological views. It must not be expected that a member of the Society of Friends will give us elaborated dogmas—that would contravene the traditions of a sect which makes little of form, but much of the spirit. But we can find in Whittier's poems, as interpreted by his letters, an unmistakable faith in evangelical truth, and the determination to witness for that truth in his writing and in his life. The breadth and sincerity of his faith is proved by the fact that his hymns are sung in public worship by all bodies of Christians, while they are cherished by many thousands as sources of private



cheer and consolation. No modern poet has done more to comfort the sorrowing, or to calm the passions of our restless age. Whittier can do this, because the peace of God is in his own heart.

He was a man of one book, and that one book was the Bible. When Edmund Gosse visited him, he was struck by the meagerness of Whittier's library. But he knew the Scriptures by heart. They were not to him the sole authority in Christian faith, for they needed to be interpreted by the Spirit. But when human reason failed, Scripture was his guide, and fallible impulses were corrected by its superior wisdom. He writes of "The Book":

Gallery of sacred pictures manifold,  
A minster rich in holy effigies,  
And bearing on entablature and frieze  
The hieroglyphic oracles of old.  
Along its transept aureoled martyrs sit;  
And the low chancel side-lights half acquaint  
The eye with shrines of prophet, bard, and saint,  
Their age-dimmed tablets traced in doubtful writ!  
But only when on form and word obscure  
Falls from above the white supernal light  
We read the mystic characters aright,  
And life informs the silent portraiture,  
Until we pause at last, awe-held, before  
The One ineffable Face, love, wonder, and adore.

And in his poem "The Word" he describes the inner voice, without which all external revelation becomes as unintelligible as the hieroglyphics of Egypt:

Voice of the Holy Spirit, making known  
Man to himself, a witness swift and sure,  
Warning, approving, true and wise and pure,  
Counsel and guidance that misleadeth none!

By thee the mystery of life is read;  
 The picture-writing of the world's gray seers,  
 The myths and parables of the primal years,  
 Whose letter kills, by thee interpreted  
 Take healthful meanings fitted to our needs,  
 And in the soul's vernacular express  
 The common law of simple righteousness.  
 Hatred of cant and doubt of human creeds  
 May well be felt: the unpardonable sin  
 Is to deny the Word of God within!

The God in whose revelation he believed is a personal God. It might almost seem as if he had Emerson in mind when, in his "Questions of Life," he wrote:

In vain to me the Sphinx propounds  
 The riddle of her sights and sounds;  
 Back still the vaulted mystery gives  
 The echoed question it receives.

. . . . .  
 I turn from Fancy's cloud-built scheme,  
 Dark creed, and mournful eastern dream  
 Of power, impersonal and cold,  
 Controlling all, itself controlled,  
 Maker and slave of iron laws,  
 Alike the subject and the cause;  
 From vain philosophies, that try  
 The sevenfold gates of mystery,  
 And, baffled ever, babble still,  
 Word-prodigo of fate and will;  
 From Nature, and her mockery, Art,  
 And book and speech of men apart,  
 To the still witness in my heart;  
 With reverence waiting to behold  
 His Avatâr of love untold,  
 The Eternal Beauty new and old!

Nature to him is no blind guide. Winnepiseogee is "the mirror of God's love":



Touched by a light that hath no name,  
 . . . . .

Are God's great pictures hung.<sup>5</sup>

So seemed it when yon hill's red crown,  
 Of old, the Indian trod,  
 And, through the sunset air, looked down  
 Upon the Smile of God.  
 To him of light and shade the laws  
 No forest skeptic taught;  
 Their living and eternal Cause  
 His truer instinct sought.

. . . . .  
 Thanks, O our Father! that, like him,  
 Thy tender love I see,  
 In radiant hill and woodland dim,  
 And tinted sunset sea.  
 For not in mockery dost Thou fill  
 Our earth with light and grace;  
 Thou hid'st no dark and cruel will  
 Behind thy smiling face.<sup>6</sup>

The Night is mother of the Day,  
 The Winter of the Spring,  
 And ever upon old Decay  
 The greenest mosses cling.  
 Behind the cloud the starlight lurks,  
 Through showers the sunbeams fall;  
 For God, who loveth all His works,  
 Hath left His hope with all!<sup>7</sup>

The harp at Nature's advent strung  
 Has never ceased to play;  
 The song the stars of morning sung  
 Has never died away.

. . . . .  
 So Nature keeps the reverent frame  
 With which her years began,  
 And all her signs and voices shame  
 The prayerless heart of man.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> "Sunset on the Bearcamp."

<sup>7</sup> "A Dream of Summer."

<sup>6</sup> "The Lakeside."

<sup>8</sup> "The Worship of Nature."

Whittier's anti-slavery poems show that he believed in a God of justice, who makes suffering to follow upon sin. "Ein Feste Burg Ist Unser Gott" is a hymn worthy to be compared with that of Luther:

We wait beneath the furnace-blast  
 The pangs of transformation;  
 Not painlessly doth God recast  
 And mould anew the nation.  
 Hot burns the fire  
 Where wrongs expire;  
 Nor spares the hand  
 That from the land  
 Uproots the ancient evil.

But he believed that God's justice is one with his love, and that penalty is always disciplinary and remedial. In "Barclay of Ury" he writes:

Not in vain, Confessor old,  
 Unto us the tale is told  
 Of thy day of trial;  
 Every age on him who strays  
 From its broad and beaten ways  
 Pours its seven-fold vial.

Happy he whose inward ear  
 Angel comfortings can hear,  
 O'er the rabble's laughter;  
 And while Hatred's fagots burn,  
 Glimpses through the smoke discern  
 Of the good hereafter.

The dread Ineffable Glory  
 Was Infinite Goodness alone.\*

"Among the Hills" gives a noble picture of the true relation between the two great attributes of God:

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\* "The Minister's Daughter."

Let Justice hold her scale, and Truth divide  
Between the right and wrong; but give the heart  
The freedom of its fair inheritance;

. . . . .

Give human nature reverence for the sake  
Of One who bore it, making it divine  
With the ineffable tenderness of God;  
Let common need, the brotherhood of prayer,  
The heirship of an unknown destiny,  
The unsolved mystery round about us, make  
A man more precious than the gold of Ophir.  
Sacred, inviolate, unto whom all things  
Should minister, as outward types and signs  
Of the eternal beauty which fulfils  
The one great purpose of creation, Love,  
The sole necessity of Earth and Heaven!

Proving in a world of bliss  
What we fondly dream in this,—  
Love is one with holiness!<sup>10</sup>

Rejoice in hope! The day and night  
Are one with God, and one with them  
Who see by faith the cloudy hem  
Of Judgment fringed with Mercy's light!<sup>11</sup>

"At Eventide" sums up the blessings of the past, and chief,

The kind restraining hand of Providence,  
The inward witness, the assuring sense  
Of an Eternal Good which overlies  
The sorrow of the world, Love which outlives  
All sin and wrong, Compassion which forgives  
To the uttermost, and Justice whose clear eyes  
Through lapse and failure look to the intent,  
And judge our frailty by the life we meant.

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<sup>10</sup> "In Memory."

<sup>11</sup> "Astræa at the Capitol."

"My Trust" illustrates God's dealing with our errors and sins, by the kind restraint with which a mother trains her child:

A picture memory brings to me:  
I look across the years and see  
Myself beside my mother's knee.

. . . . .

I wait, in His good time to see  
That as my mother dealt with me  
So with His children dealeth He.

. . . . .

I suffer with no vain pretence  
Of triumph over flesh and sense,  
Yet trust the grievous providence,

How dark soe'er it seems, may tend,  
By ways I cannot comprehend,  
To some unguessed benignant end;

That every loss and lapse may gain  
The clear-aired heights by steps of pain,  
And never cross is borne in vain.

The test of a poet's theology is his view of sin. If he ignores or condones sin, he shows that he has only a superficial conception of human nature, and is an untrustworthy moral guide. Sin is the one blot upon this fair world, the one sorrow and shame over which angels weep. But excusing sin or glorying in it is so much a matter of pride, that the poet's readiest path to popularity is that of catering to unconscientious self-esteem. When Swinburne follows natural impulses in his "Laus Veneris," it is corrupted nature that he follows. Only the Spirit of God can rectify these impulses and correct man's view. Of all our

American poets Whittier is the most sane and true, because at the basis of his poetry there is genuine conviction of sin. Like John Woolman, he had "felt the depth and extent of the misery of his fellow creatures, separated from the divine harmony—and he was mixed with them and henceforth might not consider himself a distinct and separate being." Like Woolman, he could feel for the sins of others because he had first felt the evil of sin in his own heart. "It was in no mocking humility," he says, "that I wrote in 'Andrew Rykman'":

I, who hear with secret shame  
Praise that paineth more than blame,  
Rich alone in favors lent,  
Virtuous by accident,  
Doubtful where I fain would rest,  
Frailest where I seem the best,  
Only strong for lack of test.

My mind has been a good deal exercised of late on the subject of religious obligation. The prayer of Cowper is sometimes in my mind: "Oh, for a closer walk with God!" I feel that there are many things of the world between me and the realization of a quiet communion with the pure and Holy Spirit. Alas for human nature in its best estate! There is no upward tendency in it. It looks downward. It is, indeed, of the earth. . . I know my own weakness and frailty, and I am humbled rather than exalted by homage which I do not deserve. As the swift years pass, the eternal Realities seem taking the place of the shadows and illusions of time.

In his later years he writes:

The unescapable sense of sin in thought and deed makes the boldest of us cowards. I believe in God as Justice, Goodness, Tenderness—in one word, Love—and yet my trust in him is not strong enough to overcome the natural shrinking from

the law of death. Even our Master prayed that, if it were possible, the cup might pass from him. . . I have to lament over protracted seasons of doubt and darkness, to shrink back from the discovery of some latent unfaithfulness and insincerity, to find evil at the bottom of seeming good, to abhor myself for selfishness and pride and vanity, which at times manifest themselves—in short, to find the law of sin and death still binding me. My temperament, ardent, impetuous, imaginative, powerfully acted upon from without, keenly susceptible to all influences from the intellectual world as well as to those of nature in her varied manifestations, is, I fear, ill adapted to that quiet, introverted state of patient and passive waiting for direction and support under these trials and difficulties.

He felt impelled to express his trust in the mercy of the All-Merciful, “yet with a solemn recognition of the awful consequences of alienation from Him, and a full realization of the truth that sin and suffering are inseparable.”

These quotations from his letters enable us to understand the more condensed expressions of his poems. “What the Voice Said” is significant:

“Know’st thou not all germs of evil  
In thy heart await their time?  
Not thyself, but God’s restraining,  
Stays their growth of crime.

. . . . .

“Earnest words must needs be spoken  
When the warm heart bleeds or burns  
With its scorn of wrong, or pity  
For the wronged, by turns.

“But, by all thy nature’s weakness,  
Hidden faults and follies known,  
Be thou, in rebuking evil,  
Conscious of thine own!”

“ My Namesake ” might well be a portrait of Whittier himself :

“ While others trod the altar stairs  
He faltered like the publican;  
And, while they praised as saints, his prayers  
Were those of sinful man.

“ For, awed by Sinai’s Mount of Law,  
The trembling faith alone sufficed,  
That, through its cloud and flame, he saw  
The sweet, sad face of Christ! ”

And it is in Christ alone that he puts his trust either for himself or for the world of sinners :

“ Blind must be their close-shut eyes  
Where like night the sunshine lies,  
Fiery-linked the self-forged chain  
Binding ever sin to pain,  
Strong their prison-house of will,  
But without He waiteth still.

“ Not with hatred’s undertow  
Doth the Love Eternal flow;  
Every chain that spirits wear  
Crumbles in the breath of prayer;  
And the penitent’s desire  
Opens every gate of fire.

“ Still Thy love, O Christ arisen,  
Yearns to reach these souls in prison!  
Through all depths of sin and loss  
Drops the plummet of Thy cross!  
Never yet abyss was found  
Deeper than that cross could sound! ” <sup>12</sup>

And here is a fragment, found among his papers, in his handwriting, evidently belonging to some poem he never finished :

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<sup>12</sup> “ The Grave by the Lake.”

The dreadful burden of our sins we feel,  
The pain of wounds which Thou alone canst heal,  
To whom our weakness is our strong appeal.

From the black depths, the ashes, and the dross  
Of our waste lives, we reach out to Thy cross,  
And by its fullness measure all our loss!

That holy sign reveals Thee: throned above  
No Moloch sits, no false, vindictive Jove—  
Thou art our Father, and Thy name is Love!

Whittier declares that he has become convinced of the Divinity of Christ, but he adds: "I cannot look on him as other than a man like ourselves, through whom the Divine was made miraculously manifest. Jesus of Nazareth was a man, the Christ was a God—a new revelation of the Eternal in time." But he also speaks of Christ as "Immanuel, God with us. God is one," he said; "Christ is the same Eternal One, manifested in our humanity, and in time; the Holy Spirit is the same Christ manifested within us." No reasonable Trinitarian can object to this latter statement, and by it we must interpret the statement that goes before. In the earlier declaration he is only solicitous to guard our Lord's perfect humanity; in the latter he asserts that this humanity is divine; in other words, that Jesus is the Christ. Though his declaration does not define the relations of the Three, nor even call them persons, it is not a Unitarian statement. It may be Sabellian, but it recognizes at least the Deity of Christ, and gives him supreme place in affection and service.

Only once does our poet struggle with the mystery of the Trinity, and the solution which he gives is not a speculative, but a practical one:



At morn I prayed, "I fain would see  
How Three are One, and One is Three;  
Read the dark riddle unto me."

. . . . .

In vain I turned, in weary quest,  
Old pages, where (God give them rest!)  
The poor creed-mongers dreamed and guessed.

. . . . .

Then something whispered, "Dost thou pray  
For what thou hast? This very day  
The Holy Three have crossed thy way.

"Did not the gifts of sun and air  
To good and ill alike declare  
The all-compassionate Father's care?

"In the white soul that stooped to raise  
The lost one from her evil ways,  
Thou saw'st the Christ, whom angels praise!

"A bodiless Divinity,  
The still small Voice that spake to thee  
Was the Holy Spirit's mystery!

. . . . .

"The equal Father in rain and sun,  
His Christ in the good to evil done,  
His Voice in thy soul;—and the Three are One!"

. . . . .

And my heart answered, "Lord, I see  
How Three are One, and One is Three;  
Thy riddle hath been read to me!"

It may be doubted whether this solution fully answers the demands of Scripture. We have there a recognition of personal relations of the Father to the Son, and of the Son to the Spirit, which go beyond the terms of Whittier's statement. But all that is

positive in his utterance we may accept with gladness, only adding that there is a yet larger truth which he had not perceived. Enough for our present purpose that he depended on Christ alone for salvation, in this world and in the world to come. "I am no Calvinist," he says,

But I feel in looking over my life—double-motived and full of failures—that I cannot rely upon word or work of mine to offset sins and shortcomings, but upon Love alone. . . Alas, if I have been a servant at all, I have been an unprofitable one; and yet I have loved goodness, and have longed to bring my imaginative poetic temperament into true subjection. I stand ashamed and almost despairing before holy and pure ideals. As I read the New Testament I feel how weak, irresolute, and frail I am, and how little I can rely on anything save our God's mercy and infinite compassion, which I reverently and thankfully own have followed me through life, and the assurance of which is my sole ground of hope for myself, and for those I love and pray for.

He repudiated every moral and religious scheme which makes man sufficient to himself. Neither Stoicism nor Epicureanism could satisfy his needs. "I am more and more astonished," he writes,

That such a man as Confucius could have made his appearance amidst the dull and dreary commonplaces of his people. No wiser soul ever spoke of right and duty, but his maxims have no divine sanction, and his pictures of a perfect society have no perspectives opening to eternity. Our Doctor Franklin was quite of the Confucius order—though a very much smaller man. . . I cannot help believing in prayer for spiritual things. Being fully possessed of Christ, then it is he that prays.

And his poem "The Crucifixion" shows his acceptance of the outward sacrifice offered in his behalf, as

well as of the inward renewal and help of Christ's Spirit:

That Sacrifice!—the death of Him,—  
The Christ of God, the Holy One!  
Well may the conscious Heaven grow dim,  
And blacken the beholding Sun!

. . . . .

Well may the temple-shrine grow dim,  
And shadows veil the Cherubim,  
When He, the chosen one of Heaven,  
A sacrifice for guilt is given!

And shall the sinful heart, alone,  
Behold unmoved the fearful hour,  
When Nature trembled on her throne,  
And Death resigned his iron power?  
Oh, shall the heart—whose sinfulness  
Gave keenness to His sore distress,  
And added to His tears of blood—  
Refuse its trembling gratitude?

There was a time when Orthodox Quakers were shy of publicly joining with abolitionists. This threw Whittier in with the Hicksites, though he belonged to the Orthodox. He felt that a sound belief required sound practice, and in remonstrating with his brethren, he took occasion to draw from that belief an argument for duty. "What will it avail us," he writes,

If, while boasting of our soundness and of our enmity to the delusion of Hicksism, we neglect to make a practical application of our belief to ourselves? if we neglect to seek for ourselves that precious atonement which we are so ready to argue in favor of? I do not undervalue a sound belief, but at the same time I believe it may be "held" in unrighteousness. I do not dare to claim to be any the better for my orthodox principles. The mercy of God is my only hope.

His poem "The Over-Heart" seems like a reply to Emerson's too intellectual doctrines of the Over-Soul, and to his overstatement of man's independence:

The world sits at the feet of Christ,  
 Unknowing, blind, and unconsolated;  
 It yet shall touch His garment's fold,  
 And feel the heavenly Alchemist  
 Transform its very dust to gold.

To a young physician, with Doré's picture of Christ healing the sick, he sent his poem, "The Healer":

So stood of old the holy Christ  
 Amidst the suffering throng;  
 With whom His lightest touch sufficed  
 To make the weakest strong.

That healing gift He lends to them  
 Who use it in His name;  
 The power that filled His garment's hem  
 Is evermore the same.

. . . . .

That Good Physician liveth yet  
 Thy friend and guide to be;  
 The Healer by Gennesaret  
 Shall walk the rounds with thee.

"Our Master" is a confession of faith in Christ which has passed into the hymnology of all the churches:

Immortal Love, forever full,  
 Forever flowing free,  
 Forever shared, forever whole,  
 A never-ebbing sea!

Our outward lips confess the name  
 All other names above;  
 Love only knoweth whence it came  
 And comprehendeth love.

. . . . .

We may not climb the heavenly steeps  
To bring the Lord Christ down:  
In vain we search the lowest deeps,  
For Him no depths can drown.

. . . . .

But warm, sweet, tender, even yet  
A present help is He;  
And faith has still its Olivet,  
And love its Galilee.

The healing of His seamless dress  
Is by our beds of pain;  
We touch Him in life's throng and press,  
And we are whole again.

Through Him the first fond prayers are said  
Our lips of childhood frame,  
The last low whispers of our dead  
Are burdened with His name.

Our Lord and Master of us all!  
Whate'er our name or sign,  
We own Thy sway, we hear Thy call,  
We test our lives by Thine.

"There is something in the doctrine of total depravity and regeneration," Whittier wrote. He was not so far away from Calvinism as he thought. "We are born selfish," he continues. "The discipline of life develops the higher qualities of character, in a greater or less degree. It is the conquering of innate selfish propensities that makes the saint; and the giving up unduly to impulses that in their origin are necessary to the preservation of life that makes the sinner." He believed that, as heavenly mercy has provided the sacrifice for sin, so heavenly power must make the sinner willing to accept it. "Between the Gates" represents a younger pilgrim as seeking from

an older a help that can come alone from God. But the elder pilgrim answers:

"Thy prayer, my son, transcends my gift;  
No power is mine," the sage replied,  
"The burden of a soul to lift  
Or stain of sin to hide.

"Howe'er the outward life may seem,  
For pardoning grace we all must pray;  
No man his brother can redeem  
Or a soul's ransom pay.

With deeper voice than any speech  
Of mortal lips from man to man,  
What earth's unwisdom may not teach  
The Spirit only can."

"How much of sin and want and pain there is in the world!" so he writes. "I wonder if it is all necessary—if it cannot be helped. The terrible mystery sometimes oppresses me, but I hold fast my faith in God's goodness, and the ultimate triumph of that goodness."

What to thee is shadow, to Him is day,  
And the end He knoweth,  
And not on a blind and aimless way  
The spirit goeth.

Nothing before, nothing behind;  
The steps of Faith  
Fall on the seeming void, and find  
The rock beneath.

Leaning on Him, make with reverent meekness  
His own thy will,  
And with strength from Him shall thy utter  
weakness  
Life's task fulfil;

And that cloud itself, which now before thee  
Lies dark in view,  
Shall with beams of light from the inner glory  
Be stricken through.<sup>12</sup>

To a letter from an inquiring friend Whittier replied:

I am not a Universalist, for I believe in the possibility of the perpetual loss of the soul that persistently turns away from God, in the next life as in this. But I do believe that the divine love and compassion follow us in all worlds, and that the heavenly Father will do the best that is possible for every creature that he has made. What that will be, must be left to his infinite wisdom and goodness. I would refer thee to a poem of mine, "The Answer," as containing in a few words my belief in this matter.

And these are his words:

"Though God be good and free be heaven,  
No force divine can love compel;  
And, though the song of sins forgiven  
May sound through lowest hell,

"The sweet persuasion of His voice  
Respects thy sanctity of will.  
He giveth day: thou hast thy choice  
To walk in darkness still.

. . . . .

"Forever round the Mercy-seat  
The guiding lights of Love shall burn;  
But what if, habit-bound, thy feet  
Shall lack the will to turn?

"What if thine eye refuse to see,  
Thine ear of Heaven's free welcome fail,  
And thou a willing captive be,  
Thyself thy own dark jail?"

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<sup>12</sup> "My Soul and I."

"The Vision of Echard" shows, however, that it was no outward punishment, but rather inward suffering, that he feared for the lost:

"The heaven ye seek, the hell ye fear,  
Are with yourselves alone."

But he still had hope for all men. He believed that the same inward voice that spoke to him speaks also to men of every Christian sect and even to the heathen. That voice is the voice of Christ, and he who trusts it and obeys is saved:

All souls that struggle and aspire,  
All hearts of prayer by thee are lit;  
And, dim or clear, thy tongues of fire  
On dusky tribes and twilight centuries sit.

Nor bounds, nor clime, nor creed thou know'st,  
Wide as our need thy favors fall;  
The white wings of the Holy Ghost  
Stoop, seen or unseen, o'er the heads of all.<sup>14</sup>

"All souls are Thine; the wings of morning bear  
None from that Presence which is everywhere,  
Nor hell itself can hide, for Thou art there.

"Through sins of sense, perversities of will,  
Through doubt and pain, through guilt and  
shame and ill,  
Thy pitying eye is on Thy creature still.

"Wilt Thou not make, Eternal Source and Goal!  
In Thy long years, life's broken circle whole,  
And change to praise the cry of a lost soul?"<sup>15</sup>

Whittier's firm faith in personal immortality has made his poems a treasure of comfort to the bereaved

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<sup>14</sup> "The Shadow and the Light."

<sup>15</sup> "The Cry of a Lost Soul."



and sorrowing. "Emerson once said to me," he writes,

"If there is a future life for us, it is well; if there is not, it is well also." For myself, I trust in the mercy of the All-Merciful. What is best for us we shall have, and Life and Love are best. . . What a brief and sad life this of ours would be, if it did not include the possibility of a love that takes hold of eternity! . . . There is no great use in arguing the question of immortality; one must feel its truth; you cannot climb into heaven on a syllogism. . . There are some self-satisfied souls who, as Charles Lamb says, "can stalk into futurity on stilts"; but there are more Fearings and Despondencies than Greathearts, in view of the "loss of all we know." . . I think my loved ones are still living and awaiting me. And I wait and trust. And yet how glad and grateful I should be to *know*. . . I have the instinct of immortality, but the conditions of that life are unknown. I cannot conceive what my own identity and that of dear ones gone will be. . . Yet I believe that I shall have the same friends in that other world that I have here, the same loves and aspirations and occupations.

And in his eightieth year he writes: "The great question of the Future Life is almost ever with me. I cannot answer it, but I can trust." His biographer tells us that there was not a shadow of doubt in his mind concerning the immortality of the soul; and that one day, when speaking of his own hope and expectation for the life to come, he sadly said: "I wish Emerson could have believed this." "It saddened him to feel that one whom he so deeply loved and revered had not been sustained by this most passionate longing of our human nature."

In the summer of 1882, Whittier wrote the following lines on the fly-leaf of a volume of Longfellow's poems:

Hushed now the sweet consoling tongue  
Of him whose lyre the Muses strung;  
His last low swan-song has been sung!

His last! And ours, dear friend, is near;  
As clouds that rake the mountains here,  
We too shall pass and disappear.

Yet howsoever changed or tost,  
Not even a wreath of mist is lost,  
No atom can itself exhaust.

So shall the soul's superior force  
Live on and run its endless course  
In God's unlimited universe.

And we, whose brief reflections seem  
To fade like clouds from lake and stream,  
Shall brighten in a holier beam.

In "Snow-Bound," our poet touchingly records the family group that circled round the hearth of early days, and wonders where the dear members of that household now are:

O Time and Change!—with hair as gray  
As was my sire's that winter day,  
How strange it seems, with so much gone  
Of life and love, to still live on!  
Ah, brother! only I and thou  
Are left of all that circle now,—  
The dear home faces whereupon  
That fitful firelight paled and shone.  
Henceforward, listen as we will,  
The voices of that hearth are still;  
Look where we may, the wide earth o'er,  
Those lighted faces smile no more.  
We tread the paths their feet have worn,  
We sit beneath their orchard trees,  
We hear, like them, the hum of bees  
And rustle of the bladed corn;

We turn the pages that they read,  
    Their written words we linger o'er,  
But in the sun they cast no shade,  
No voice is heard, no sign is made,  
    No step is on the conscious floor!  
Yet Love will dream, and Faith will trust,  
(Since He who knows our need is just,)       
That somehow, somewhere, meet we must.  
Alas for him who never sees  
The stars shine through his cypress-trees!  
Who, hopeless, lays his dead away,  
Nor looks to see the breaking day  
Across the mournful marbles play!  
Who hath not learned, in hours of faith,  
    The truth to flesh and sense unknown,  
That Life is ever lord of Death,  
    And Love can never lose its own!

If Whittier had written no other poem than this, he would have earned immortality as a poet. Not by his worst, but by his best, must the poet be judged. The defects of Whittier's poetry are easy to perceive and easy to criticize. His genius was rustic and homely; he never learned compression; he spun out his verse after the divine afflatus had ceased; he moralized when he should have left his story to tell its own lesson. But all this is only to say that he regarded poetry as a means, rather than as an end, and that he sought always to serve truth and righteousness thereby. There can be no more striking contrast in this respect than that between him and Goethe. Art for art's sake was to Whittier a prostitution of genius. "A long poem," he said, "unconsecrated to religion and humanity, would be a criminal waste of life." He aimed to fulfil Paul's injunction to do all to the glory of God, and the glory of God meant for him the good

of man. So he has been called "the Quaker priest"; and much of his poetry is little more than rhythmical preaching. But it came from the heart, and it touched the heart. It was the utterance of an uncorrupted conscience, and it stirred the conscience. When Lowell was a callow youth, and Longfellow was absorbed in his books, and Emerson was wrapped in philosophic clouds, Whittier alone gave himself body and soul to the cause of freedom, and compelled all the rest to follow. More than all other poets combined he roused our people to see the evil of slavery and at unspeakable cost to abolish it.

He was a natural balladist. His poetry was simple and direct, like that of Burns; his prose had the lofty swell and exuberance of Milton. Indian legends attracted him, but he never mastered the improvidence of that dying race, as did Longfellow; the wit and humor of New England did not impress him as it impressed Lowell. But the courage of a humble soul was never more thrillingly described than in "Barbara Frietchie," nor the pathos of life more touchingly than in that ballad of "Maud Muller," in which the New England Judge and the village maid meet for one moment and part to see each other again only as memory makes recall:

Alas for maiden, alas for Judge,  
For rich repiner and household drudge!

God pity them both! and pity us all,  
Who vainly the dreams of youth recall.

For of all sad words of tongue or pen,  
The saddest are these: "It might have been!"

Ah, well! for us all some sweet hope lies  
Deeply buried from human eyes;

And, in the hereafter, angels may  
Roll the stone from its grave away!

We have had no poet more truly Christian, none who laid his gifts more completely at the feet of Christ, none who more completely identified himself with the suffering and oppressed. His life of sacrifice was not permitted to go unrewarded. After twenty years of privation, in which he was regarded as a mere rhymester and reformer, the world began to perceive that he was a true poet, and that his homely verse was most truly American. Not only the friendship of the learned and the good, but an unexpected prosperity and comfort, crowned his latter days. The promise of "manifold more in this present time" was fulfilled to him. On his eightieth birthday he was presented with a portfolio containing hundreds of autographs of Massachusetts officials, the signatures of "fifty-nine United States Senators, the entire bench of the Supreme Court of the United States headed by Chief Justice Waite, Speaker Carlisle of the House of Representatives, and three hundred and thirty members of the House coming from every State and Territory in the Union. To these were added the names of many private citizens of distinction, such as George Bancroft, Robert C. Winthrop, James G. Blaine, and Frederick Douglass." This portfolio only feebly expressed the affection in which he was held by the whole American people, and their gratitude for his influence and example. Like Abraham Lincoln, he was a man

of the people, and a man for the hour. He was honored because he had served.

Whittier lived to be eighty-five years of age. Bachelor as he was, he was tenderly cared for by relatives and friends, and his last days were quiet and restful. His hymn entitled "The Eternal Goodness" is a confession of faith which has comforted many of the afflicted:

I long for household voices gone,  
For vanished smiles I long,  
But God hath led my dear ones on,  
And He can do no wrong.

I know not what the future hath  
Of marvel or surprise,  
Assured alone that life and death  
His mercy underlies.

And if my heart and flesh are weak  
To bear an untried pain,  
The bruised reed He will not break,  
But strengthen and sustain.

No offering of my own I have,  
Nor works my faith to prove;  
I can but give the gifts He gave,  
And plead His love for love.

And so beside the Silent Sea,  
I wait the muffled oar;  
No harm from Him can come to me  
On ocean or on shore.

I know not where His islands lift  
Their fronded palms in air;  
I only know I cannot drift  
Beyond His love and care.

" The end of that man was peace." His poem  
 " The Brewing of Soma " gives his prescription for  
 all earthly care and trouble :

Dear Lord and Father of mankind,  
 Forgive our foolish ways!  
 Reclothe us in our rightful mind,  
 In purer lives Thy service find,  
 In deeper reverence, praise.

In simple trust like theirs who heard  
 Beside the Syrian sea  
 The gracious calling of the Lord,  
 Let us, like them, without a word,  
 Rise up and follow Thee.

O Sabbath rest by Galilee!  
 O calm of hills above,  
 Where Jesus knelt to share with Thee  
 The silence of eternity  
 Interpreted by love!

Drop Thy still dews of quietness,  
 Till all our strivings cease;  
 Take from our souls the strain and stress,  
 And let our ordered lives confess  
 The beauty of Thy peace.

Breathe through the heats of our desire  
 Thy coolness and Thy balm;  
 Let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;  
 Speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire,  
 O still, small voice of calm!

" My Psalm " is a yet more convincing assurance of  
 his freedom from anxiety with regard to his own  
 future or the future of the world :

I mourn no more my vanished years:  
 Beneath a tender rain,  
 An April rain of smiles and tears,  
 My heart is young again.

The west winds blow, and, singing low,  
I hear the glad streams run;  
The windows of my soul I throw  
Wide open to the sun.

No longer forward nor behind  
I look in hope or fear;  
But, grateful, take the good I find,  
The best of now and here.

. . . . .

All as God wills, who wisely heeds  
To give or to withhold,  
And knoweth more of all my needs  
Than all my prayers have told!

Enough that blessings undeserved  
Have marked my erring track;  
That wheresoe'er my feet have swerved,  
His chastening turned me back;

That more and more a Providence  
Of love is understood,  
Making the springs of time and sense  
Sweet with eternal good;—

That death seems but a covered way  
Which opens into light,  
Wherein no blinded child can stray  
Beyond the Father's sight;

That care and trial seem at last,  
Through Memory's sunset air,  
Like mountain ranges overpast,  
In purple distance fair;

That all the jarring notes of life  
Seem blending in a psalm,  
And all the angles of its strife  
Slow rounding into calm.

And so the shadows fall apart,  
And so the west winds play;  
And all the windows of my heart  
I open to the day.



Whittier illustrates Augustine's doctrine that humility is the fundamental grace of the Christian character. Humility is no mere self-depreciation; it is a coming down to the *humus*, or hard-pan, of actual fact; it is the estimate of self according to the divine standard, which is nothing less than absolute conformity to the character of God. When we compare ourselves with one another, we may be proud; when we compare ourselves with infinite purity and benevolence, we must be humble. Humility is the indispensable condition of religious knowledge, for only the childlike spirit can understand God; it is the condition of all spiritual power, for only the receptive soul can be the medium of divine revelation. The secret of Whittier's life and work was his humble faith in God. "I believe in a living God," he said. That is the quintessence of Quakerism. "The Friends" took that name because they were first of all God's friends, and then for God's sake had become friends to suffering and sinning men. Our poet had learned that God is not far away, but a present God, a God here and now, a God reconciled to men through the infinite sacrifice of his only begotten Son, a God who reveals himself to the contrite spirit by an inner voice, condensing into a moment his works of power, and making his servants mighty to do and to endure. It is this humble faith of Whittier that has conquered criticism, has made "Snow-Bound" more popular than Oliver Goldsmith's "Deserted Village," or Robert Burns's "Cotter's Saturday Night," and has given his poetry, in spite of its defects of rhyme and of compression, an imperishable fame. In the last of his poems, written but a few weeks be-

fore his death, and addressed "To Oliver Wendell Holmes," he sums up this faith of his life:

The hour draws near, howe'er delayed and late,  
When at the Eternal Gate  
We leave the words and works we call our own,  
And lift void hands alone

For love to fill. Our nakedness of soul  
Brings to that Gate no toll;  
Giftless we come to Him, who all things gives,  
And live, because He lives.

And I cannot better close my essay than by quoting the words which Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote in memory of his friend:

"For thee, dear friend, there needs no high-wrought lay,  
To shed its aureole round thy cherished name,—  
Thou whose plain, home-born speech of *Yea* and *Nay*  
Thy truthful nature ever best became.

. . . . .  
"Best loved and saintliest of our singing train,  
Earth's noblest tributes to thy name belong.  
A lifelong record closed without a stain,  
A blameless memory, shrined in deathless song."

IV

EDGAR ALLAN POE



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IN passing from Whittier to Poe, we learn how wide is the realm of poetry. To use Sir William Hamilton's phrase, the two poets are separated by "the whole diameter of being." Yet the contrast is not absolute; "being" connects the two; each of them depicts life. If we note the differences, we perceive that Whittier is the most American of our poets, while Poe is well-nigh devoid of national characteristics. Whittier is the poet of plain country life; Poe is airily aristocratic, and is at home only in the town. Whittier grew up amid the hardships of a New England farm and the rude lessons of a New England schoolhouse; Poe was the spoiled child of a Southern household, gained in England his introduction to the classics, and had some part of his training in the University of Virginia and in the United States Military Academy at West Point. Whittier was a devotee of duty; Poe was a devotee of beauty. Whittier made his poetry a lifelong protest against slavery; Poe ignored all moral issues, and regarded all reformers as madmen. Whittier was a man of faith, looked upon conscience as the voice of God, saw the future lit up by God's love and God's promises, and so, held to an optimistic view of the universe and to an unwavering assurance of immortal life; Poe was a soured and self-willed unbeliever, esteeming the Bible to be mere rigmarole and the world to be an

automatic process from nothingness to nothingness; a victim of uncontrolled appetites which alternately crazed and tormented him, but without God and without hope either for this world or for the world to come; in short, a poet already in hell and singing only of despair.

These are the points of difference. Yet Poe, as well as Whittier, was a poet. In certain respects he was more highly endowed. His range was narrower, but within that range there was more of imagination; he had the critical instinct, which Whittier lacked, and he was our first master of the technique of poetry; above all, he was a melodist, the music of whose verse, like that of Shelley, lulled the senses.<sup>1</sup> While Whittier was immensurably the superior in the breadth and substance of his utterance, Poe was the superior in form. In the early day when pretentious mediocrity crowded the stage, Poe both by example and by precept gave direction to our literary ventures, made doggerel contemptible, and set a new and better standard of poetical success. That his work was not in vain is proved by the fact that some European judges, especially among the French, have called him our greatest American poet.

It is the purpose of this essay to expand and to justify these statements with regard to Poe, and I can best begin by briefly sketching his life. It was the pitiful and tragic life of a genius consumed by vanity and enslaved by drink. I would be gentle in my judg-

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<sup>1</sup>In many ways the short life, early excesses and insanity, small poetical product and melodious elaboration of abstract and ideal qualities of William Collins (1721-1759) furnish a remarkable analogy to the life and work of Poe.

ments, but I would be truthful also. Let us remember that Poe made Rufus Wilmot Griswold his literary executor, and trusted him as his biographer. Griswold was the most capable compiler of his day. He was nearest to the scenes, and was most familiar with the facts of Poe's life. His story was so damaging to the poet's reputation that later writers attributed its dark colors to personal animosity. The half century that has followed, however, although it has witnessed the discovery of new material, has invalidated no essential of Griswold's conclusions. The "Life of Edgar Allan Poe," by Prof. George E. Woodberry, printed in 1909, the hundredth year after Poe's birth, is a most complete and thorough résumé of all that is really known about Poe's history, and in all substantial matters it concedes the justice of Griswold's earlier judgments. It is a calmer and tenderer review than Griswold's, and the sad truth is for the most part left to tell its own story. But "the archangel ruined" is none the less visible, for lack of the biographer's denunciation.

Poe's grandfather, David, was a stalwart Irish immigrant, who settled in Philadelphia. He loved freedom and hated England. He was one of the patriots of our Revolution, and a quartermaster in our Continental Army. General Poe, as he was called, was so proud and prosperous that, when his son David, our poet's father, married an actress and became himself an actor, the general disinherited him and turned him adrift. Three children were born of this union, of whom Edgar was the second. The parents led the itinerant and obscure life of second-rate players.

Of the father's end nothing is known. But the mother, after pitiful struggles with poverty and appeals for public sympathy, died in Richmond, Virginia, leaving her children in utter destitution. The heart of the grandfather was apparently touched by their need, for he took the elder son, William, under his care. Rosalie, the youngest child, found a home with a family named Mackenzie. Mr. John Allan, a Richmond tobacco-merchant of Scottish birth, and his young wife, who was childless, had pity for Edgar, the beautiful two-year-old orphan boy, and, without adopting him, treated him in almost all respects as their son and heir.

It might have seemed that the boy's fortune was made. He entered a home of comfort and even of luxury; he became the pet and admiration of the household; pony and dogs enlivened his hours of recreation; while under various teachers he learned to read, to draw, to declaim, and to dance. He was an apt scholar, though impulsive and dreamy. He had inherited the histrionic temperament and he delighted in exhibiting his talents. Mr. Allan most unwisely entertained his friends at dinner by lifting the little boy with his curly locks to a chair, upon which he stood while he held his glass of wine, recited his verses, and drank to the health of the company. He was subjected to no real government; his pranks and his caprices were matters of amusement; Southern hospitality did little to correct his natural pride and selfishness; he tells us, indeed, that he "was left to the guidance of his own will."

The most peaceful, and perhaps the happiest, time of his life was the lustrum which he spent at Stoke-



Newington, near London, under the rigorous tutelage of Doctor Bransby. Mr. Allan made a long visit of five years in England, and Edgar's time from his sixth to his eleventh year was usefully employed in study at this excellent preparatory school. His tale entitled "William Wilson" is in part autobiographical, and it gives us a charming picture of the boy's school life in the somber hall with its oaken ceiling, and in the maze of its dormitory passages. The age and gloom of English architecture made deep impression upon him; then, and only then, after his earlier company with his foster-mother, does he seem ever to have entered a church. He was an athlete among his fellows; a quick and capable scholar; but also a boy of moods and enmities, free with his money and on his off days given to cakes and ale. The master of the school recognized his talent, but regretted that his guardian provided him with so much to spend. Vacations were doubtless occupied in travel, for Poe's writings show familiarity with a great number of famous castles and donjon-keeps, as well as with their blood-curdling histories. These years abroad made our poet a gentleman and a scholar, so far as early training could mold a peculiarly sensitive and wilful spirit.

The return to Richmond in 1820 was followed by three years of schooling under Joseph H. Clarke, a graduate of Trinity College, Dublin, and then by three more years under Master William Burk. Poe was easily the first of his schoolmates in his Latin and his French, but his accuracy and thoroughness were not equal to his own powers of perception. Though handsome in person, a swimmer and a boxer, he was

not popular among his fellows. A certain moodiness and instability characterized him. This was partly due to the fact that his better-born classmates looked down upon the son of an actor and the recipient of a guardian's charity. Mr. Allan himself, notwithstanding his interest and indulgence, was not a man of affectionate nature, and it was his wife who most cared for the boy. There seems indeed to have grown up something like estrangement between the guardian and his young charge. Edgar's leadership of a Thespian Society may have awakened fear that he might, like his parents, gravitate to the stage. Poe, however, attracted women, and was attracted by them. Some of his earliest verses were written in memory of a married lady who had spoken like a mother to the motherless boy, and who had soon after left him desolate by her death. The poem "To Helen" was the germ of "Lenore" and of "Irene," and we may see in it the first-fruits of the poet's genius:

Helen, thy beauty is to me  
Like those Nicæan barks of yore,  
That gently, o'er a perfumed sea,  
The weary, wayworn wanderer bore  
To his own native shore.

On desperate seas long wont to roam,  
Thy hyacinth hair, thy classic face,  
Thy Naiad airs, have brought me home  
To the glory that was Greece  
And the grandeur that was Rome.

Lo! in yon brilliant window-niche  
How statue-like I see thee stand,  
The agate lamp within thy hand!  
Ah, Psyche, from the regions which  
Are Holy Land!

But there were other verses to younger women also, and there was an actual betrothal of the sixteen-year-old poet to a seventeen-year-old girl. Parents, however, had not been consulted, and these youthful fancies were broken off when Edgar, in 1826, was matriculated in the University of Virginia, and the young lady had married another man.

Mr. J. H. Whitty has edited the most complete critical edition of Poe's poems, and has prefaced it with a minute and painstaking account of the facts of the poet's life. He has also done good service by exhuming from the Library of Congress and from the old "Graham's Magazine" certain lost poems of our author. One of these is entitled "The Divine Right of Kings," and it exhibits both Poe's susceptibility to female charms and his early skill in versification. I venture to transcribe it:

The only King by right divine  
Is Ellen King, and were she mine,  
I'd strive for liberty no more,  
But hug the glorious chains I wore.

Her bosom is an ivory throne  
Where tyrant virtue reigns alone;  
No subject vices dare interfere  
To check the power that governs here.

Oh! would she deign to rule my fate,  
I'd worship Kings with kingly state,  
And hold this maxim all life long:  
The King—my King—can do no wrong.

Would that our story of Poe's life might end here!  
But its brilliant promise was the precursor of a gradual  
and fearful decline. Whether it was an outbreaking of

innate tendencies hitherto repressed or a reaction from his disappointment in love, his brief course in college was marked by a recklessness of behavior which increased with his years and ended in insanity and death. He was no mean scholar, and he made some progress in Greek, and Spanish, and Italian. But the love for drink which he had learned at the dinner-table of his guardian, and which was fostered by the convivial habits of the planters' sons with whom he associated, was too much for his self-control, and he gave way to occasional intemperance. The draughts which his friends could stand with apparent impunity deprived him of reason. A single glass of wine excited him; a second made him garrulous; a third turned the whole world into a merry-go-round. It was not the taste of liquor which tempted him, but rather its inebriating effect. He would toss off a whole goblet of brandy, without sugar or water, and then would be a lunatic. "At Jefferson University, Charlottesville," he writes, "I led a very dissipated life—the college at that period being shamefully dissolute." But he says long afterward: "I have absolutely no pleasure in the stimulants in which I sometimes so madly indulge. It has not been in the pursuit of pleasure that I have periled life and reputation and reason. It has been in the desperate attempt to escape from torturing memories." He added gambling to drunkenness, and showed such extravagance in his wagers that he soon lost caste with his college mates. Poe had entered the university in February; when its session closed in the following December the young man's "debts of honor," so called, amounted to two thousand five hundred dollars. These

Mr. Allan refused to pay, and Poe left the university in humiliation and disgrace. But he threw the blame of his discomfiture entirely upon his patron, for he says of this incident: "In early youth I deliberately threw away from me a large fortune, rather than endure a trivial wrong." He had forfeited his birthright like Esau, but he never, like Esau, repented with tears.

He was offered a clerkship in his guardian's counting-room. But business had no attractions for him, and he fled to Boston. To hide his mortification from the world, to escape the stings of conscience, and perhaps to subject himself to needed discipline, he enlisted under an assumed name, as E. A. Perry, in the United States army, and spent nearly two years in the artillery service, first at Fort Independence, near Boston, and then at Fort Moultrie, near Charleston, South Carolina. He was only eighteen when he became a soldier, but he gave his age as twenty-two. His conduct in the service was so creditable that he was promoted to be sergeant-major. His officers recognized his superior education and refinement, and after nearly two years they used their influence to secure his reconciliation with his guardian. Mr. Allan apparently sent money for a substitute in the army, which the substitute did not receive, and there was a report that Poe forged the signature of the substitute in order to appropriate it. Certain it is that Mr. Allan was obliged to pay the sum twice over, and that he never, after this, took the young man back into his family. He did, however, procure for him an appointment to a cadetship at West Point, and there, on July 1, 1830, Poe entered the Military Academy. But on the fol-

lowing January twenty-eighth he was dismissed for neglecting his duties as cadet, and for general contempt of discipline. He was older than his classmates, and took the highest marks in mathematics and in French. But he was restless, harsh, and satirical, given to drinking and to escapades, and incapable of obedience as a soldier. Arrest, punishment, and expulsion inevitably followed.

It is no wonder that from this time Mr. Allan lost all confidence in his protégé, and disclaimed all responsibility for him. Yet he seems to have paid him an annuity for three following years, and to have kept the wolf from the poet's door when he was first struggling for a standing in the literary world. His guardian's generosity was all the more creditable, since the first Mrs. Allan, Poe's special friend, had died, and Mr. Allan had now a child of his own by a second marriage. Poe went back to Richmond after his expulsion from West Point, hoping still to win back his guardian's favor. Mr. Allan was ill, and forbidden to receive visitors. Poe disregarded the prohibition of Mrs. Allan and made his way into the sick-room. This angered Mr. Allan, and he lifted his cane to chastise Poe, who retired in complete discomfiture. It was only a fit return for Poe's insubordination and ingratitude, and it marked the end of all relations between them. In 1834 Mr. Allan died, and made no mention of Poe in his will.<sup>2</sup> From 1831 our poet lived in Baltimore with

<sup>2</sup> Poe's contemptuous opposition to Mr. Allan's second marriage, and Poe's scandalous treatment of the second wife, must be added to the reasons for this neglect to provide for him. Mrs. Allan spoke of Poe's "ingratitude, fraud, and deceit," and, after her husband's death at the early age of fifty-two, she refused ever to meet the poet. Disparity in the parties' age does not justify Poe's opposition to the marriage, for, while Miss Paterson was twenty-five, Mr. Allan at the time was only forty-eight.

Mrs. Clemm, his deceased father's sister, and with her daughter Virginia, whom he afterward married. With the cutting off of his annuity his circumstances became greatly straitened, and his frequent lapses into intemperance made his life wretched. Only the industry and affection of his aunt carried him through the resulting sicknesses and despondencies. But the winning of a prize of one hundred dollars by his tale of "A Manuscript Found in a Bottle" rescued him from trouble, and gave him hope for the future.

Poe was a man fiercely possessed by the desire for fame. "I love fame; I dote on it; I idolize it," he wrote. He aimed, to use his own words, "to kick up a bobbery." "I am young, not yet 20, am a poet, if deep worship of all beauty can make me one, and wish to be so, in the more common meaning of the word. I would give the world to embody half the ideal afloat in my imagination." So early as his fourteenth year he had written verses, and in 1827, before enlisting in the army in Boston, he published a little book entitled "Tamerlane and Other Poems." "Tamerlane" is the story, in verse, of a shepherd's son who, under the spur of an inordinate ambition, leaves his betrothed, without explaining his purpose, and under a feigned name seeks to win for her a throne. He succeeds; but when he returns to lay the crown at her feet, he finds that, in his absence and apparent desertion, she has died of grief. In this story of the Emperor of Samarcand, Poe found expression for some features of his own biography. He was just about to become a soldier, and under a feigned name. He was conscious of great literary powers, and he fancied that he could

make the whole world sing his praises. He was an exile from home, and had already lost a friend most dear to him. The shadows of a settled melancholy were gathering about him. Death and the sepulcher loomed up in the distance. And the youthful poet has no refuge or comforter but pride:

The passionate spirit which hath known,  
And deeply felt the silent tone  
Of its own self-supremacy—

. . . . .

The soul which feels its innate right—  
The mystic empire and high power  
Given by the energetic might  
Of Genius, at its natal hour;  
Which knows (believe me at this time,  
When falsehood were a tenfold crime,  
There is a power in the high spirit  
To *know* the fate it will inherit)  
The soul, which knows such power, will still  
Find *Pride* the ruler of its will.

And pride brings only despair and a broken heart. This earliest of Poe's verses seems now a prophecy of his end:

I reach'd my home—my home no more—  
For all was flown that made it so—  
I pass'd from out its mossy door,  
In vacant idleness of woe.  
There met me on its threshold stone  
A mountain hunter, I had known  
In childhood, but he knew me not.  
Something he spoke of the old cot:  
It had seen better days, he said;  
*There* rose a fountain once, and *there*  
Full many a fair flower raised its head:  
But she who rear'd them was long dead,



And in such follies had no part,  
What was there left me *now?* despair—  
A kingdom for a broken—heart.

The second of these youthful poems demands notice, not only because it is his longest piece of verse, but also because it represents the imagination and transcendental style of his thinking. "Al Aaraaf," as he himself says, is a star discovered by Tycho Brahe, which appeared suddenly in the heavens, attained, in a few days, a brilliancy surpassing that of Jupiter, then as suddenly disappeared, and has never since been seen. He makes this star the abode of all the loveliness that perishes on earth. In a melodious rhapsody as disjointed as a dream, he celebrates the beauty of a world which earth's sorrows have never entered, and where no moral restraints hinder the activity of its denizens. Nesace, who seems the personified spirit of this ideal realm, summons her lover to join her there:

"Leave tenantless thy crystal home, and fly,  
With all thy train, athwart the moony sky,  
Apart—like fireflies in Sicilian night,  
And wing to other worlds another light!  
Divulge the secrets of thy embassy  
To the proud orbs that twinkle, and so be  
To every heart a barrier and a ban  
Lest the stars totter in the guilt of man!"

We might well doubt whether this invocation had any definite meaning, if it were not for the partial explanation, in Part II, with regard to the ultimate destiny of the lovers:

For what (to them) availeth it to know  
That Truth is Falsehood, or that Bliss is Woe?  
Sweet was their death—with them to die was rife

With the last ecstasy of satiate life;  
 Beyond that death no immortality,  
 But sleep that pondereth and is not "to be;"  
 And there, oh, may my weary spirit dwell,  
 Apart from Heaven's Eternity—and yet how far  
 from Hell!

What guilty spirit, in what shrubbery dim,  
 Heard not the stirring summons of that hymn?  
 But two; they fell; for Heaven no grace imparts  
 To those who hear not for their beating hearts;  
 A maiden-angel and her seraph-lover.  
 Oh, where (and ye may seek the wide skies over)  
 Was Love, the blind, near sober Duty known?  
 Unguided Love hath fallen 'mid "tears of perfect  
 moan."

The lesson of the poem is manifestly this, that the delights of love are to be sought even at the price of annihilation. But I must leave the theology of "Al Aaraaf" for later exposition, and content myself now with pointing out that this juvenile poetry, though instinct with imagination and melody, was greatly lacking in unity and rationality. These latter merits came to Poe after years of experiment, and as the result of writing and reflection in other lines. Poetry with him was an occasional and a rare product—to use his own words, "a passion, and not a purpose." The quantity of it was exceedingly small. He wrote exceedingly little, but gave endless emendation and polish to his work. In his day poetry was not a selling commodity; the poet was forced to earn his living; magazine literature alone furnished him a support. His imagination made his first successful work to be "Tales of the Arabesque and the Grotesque." He was the forerunner of Conan Doyle in his detective stories. The mystery and

ingenuity of "The Gold Bug" and "The Murders of the Rue Morgue" are distinctly new features of literary romance. We cannot too highly praise the artistic skill with which the elements of his plots are marshaled, and every stroke is made to lead to the sudden and startling conclusion. But little by little Poe came to think that to startle was to succeed. His romance had not the realistic basis of Swift and Defoe. The bizarre, the gruesome, the loathsome, the fiendish, occupied his thoughts and became the subjects of his pen. He aims to make our flesh creep. He appeals exclusively to the nerves. Burial alive, epileptic fits, the mesmerism of a dying man, the possession of one soul by that of another who has departed, somnambulism, metapsychosis, the gouging out of eyes, suicide-compacts, ghosts, tombs, endless sorrow and despair—these have never been more fearfully portrayed than by Edgar Allan Poe. "His realm," says Griswold, "was on the shadowy confines of human experience, among the abodes of crime, gloom, and horror, and there he delighted to surround himself with images of beauty and of terror, to raise his solemn palaces and towers and spires in a night upon which should rise no sun." In all this he depicted the lashings of his own conscience, his utter lack of faith in God and in a life beyond the grave, his horror in view of the death to which his lost soul was hastening, and the unspeakable misery and gloom of a sinner without Christ and without hope. There is a somber splendor about "The Fall of the House of Usher," and a melancholy sweetness about "Ligeia"; but Poe's tales are tales of the charnel-house, and their odor of decay is quite foreign

to the beauty which he held to be the end and aim of perfect art.

Poetry had a rival not only in Poe's tales, but also in Poe's criticism. From being a contributor to magazines he became an editor. Instead of writing stories of his own, he came to criticize the work of others. He passed successively in review all the prominent authors of his day, whether American or English. Much of our literature had been characterized by dull mediocrity, and this dull mediocrity had been praised. Poe subjected this dull work to trenchant criticism. His insight was keen, he had correct principles of judgment, and he had little mercy for those who failed to satisfy his tests. We owe him a great debt, for he was our first American critic. But he was too exclusively censorious. He wielded the broadax rather than the rapier. His magazine motto seemed to be, "Hang, draw, and quarter," it has been wittily said. His exposure of pretense and ridicule of error made him many enemies. He aimed to startle even here. His criticisms commanded attention indeed. Within a few months he increased the circulation of a magazine from five to forty-five thousand. But there was an ill temper and arrogance in his writing which resulted from disordered habits. His tale, "The Imp of the Perverse," well describes his own mental and moral unsoundness. His treatment of Longfellow can hardly be explained except as an ebullition of envy and malice. He prefaced his review of "The Voices of the Night" with the acrimonious title, "Mr. Longfellow, and other Plagiarists"; and he characterized the poet's "Midnight Mass for the Dying Year" as

belonging "to the most barbarous class of literary robbery." Longfellow generously replied, "The harshness of his criticisms I have never attributed to anything but the irritation of a sensitive nature, chafed by some indefinite sense of wrong." Those who stood nearer to Poe could not form so charitable a judgment. Griswold, Willis, and Lowell bore with him, but he attacked them all, until forbearance was no longer a virtue. Hawthorne, he thought, had stolen directly from passages in "William Wilson." "Mr. Bryant is not *all* a fool. Mr. Willis is not *quite* an ass. Carlyle is an ass, and Emerson is his imitator." He calls Miss Fuller "that detestable old maid." Lowell is "a ranting abolitionist, a fanatic for the mere love of fanaticism." Lowell replied that Poe sometimes mistook his vial of prussic acid for his inkstand. His colleagues could not forever endure his whims and his abuse. One connection after another was broken; one friend after another was alienated. Brilliant promise was succeeded by pitiful failure. Riotous intemperance ruined his prospects even after long periods of abstinence. The use of opium was added to indulgence in drink, and under the influence of these stimulants Poe was a madman.

The story of his marriage and of the illness and death of his young and beautiful wife is most pathetic. Virginia was the child of Mrs. Clemm, the aunt who toiled for him and sheltered him through all his escapades and illnesses. His tale "Eleonora" is autobiographical. It tells the story of a romantic love, which seems at first to have been illicit. A license was issued in September, 1835, but there is no record of

marriage following until May, 1836. Then a public marriage took place, when Virginia was hardly fourteen, though a relative satisfied the legal requirement by testifying that she was twenty-two. Her married life lasted for twelve troubled years. A friend describes the scene as she neared her end: "There was no clothing on the bed, which was only straw, but a white counterpane and sheets. The weather was cold, and the sick lady had the dreadful chills that accompany the hectic fever of consumption. She lay on the straw bed, wrapped in her husband's great coat, with a large tortoise-shell cat on her bosom. The wonderful cat seemed conscious of her great usefulness. The coat and the cat were the sufferer's only means of warmth, except as her husband held her hands, and her mother her feet." In 1847 she died, and the poet wrote his memorial of her in "Annabel Lee":

It was many and many a year ago,  
In a kingdom by the sea,  
That a maiden lived whom you may know  
By the name of Annabel Lee;  
And this maiden she lived with no other thought  
Than to love and be loved by me.

I was a child and she was a child,  
In this kingdom by the sea,  
But we loved with a love that was more than love,  
I and my Annabel Lee;  
With a love that the wingèd seraphs of heaven  
Coveted her and me.

And this was the reason that, long ago,  
In this kingdom by the sea,  
A wind blew out of a cloud, chilling  
My beautiful Annabel Lee;


So that her highborn kinsmen came  
And bore her away from me,  
To shut her up in a sepulchre  
In this kingdom by the sea.

The angels, not half so happy in heaven,  
Went envying her and me;  
Yes! that was the reason (as all men know,  
In this kingdom by the sea)  
That the wind came out of the cloud by night,  
Chilling and killing my Annabel Lee.

But our love it was stronger by far than the love  
Of those who were older than we,  
Of many far wiser than we;  
And neither the angels in heaven above,  
Nor the demons down under the sea,  
Can ever dissever my soul from the soul  
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee:

For the moon never beams, without bringing me  
dreams  
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;  
And the stars never rise, but I feel the bright eyes  
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;  
And so, all the night-tide, I lie down by the side  
Of my darling—my darling—my life and my bride,  
In the sepulchre there by the sea,  
In her tomb by the sounding sea.


This is real poetry, and it expresses at least occasional and temporary emotion. But it is certain that Poe made love to other women during the lifetime of his wife. And though he clung to her for sympathy and pity, he plunged her into poverty and distress. He regarded himself as a victim, however, rather than as a criminal, and I quote from one of his letters his own self-justification:




I can do no more than hint. This "evil" was the greatest that can befall a man. Six years ago, a wife, whom I loved as no man ever loved before, ruptured a blood-vessel in singing. Her life was despaired of. I took leave of her forever and underwent all the agonies of her death. She recovered partially, and I again hoped. At the end of the year the vessel broke again. I went through precisely the same scene. Then again—again—and even once again, at varying intervals. Each time I felt all the agonies of her death—and at each accession of the disorder I loved her more dearly and clung to her life with more desperate pertinacity. But I am constitutionally sensitive—nervous in a very unusual degree—I became insane, with long intervals of horrible sanity. During these fits of absolute unconsciousness I drank—God only knows how often or how much. As a matter of course my enemies referred the insanity to the drink, rather than the drink to the insanity.

To Lowell he wrote: "My life has been whim, impulse, passion"—and this is the only explanation of his career. In him Stevenson's Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde were mixed. He was by turns industrious and slothful. One of his friends touched the secret of his troubles when he told Poe that "no man is safe who drinks before breakfast."

Whatever we may think of Poe's defense, drink and opium were his undoing. His tales, his criticism, and finally the poem of "The Raven" gave him an ever-increasing fame, and his connection with "The Saturday Visitor," "The Southern Literary Messenger," "The Gentleman's Magazine," "Graham's Magazine," "The Evening Mirror," "The Broadway Journal," whether as contributor or as editor, gave successive promise of pecuniary reward. But there was a demon beside him that always snatched the cup of prosperity from his hand when he was about to drink. Though







he made friends, one by one, of Wilmer, White, Kennedy, Tuckerman, Burton, Graham, Greeley—all of them men who sought to aid him—his ingratitude and rancorous denunciation broke up every friendship, and left him solitary and unhappy. He joined the Sons of Temperance, and broke his vows. He sought to repair his fortunes by marriage, and forfeited all claims to his bride by drunkenness on the eve of the intended wedding. He was a physical and mental wreck. The end came at last. Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York had been places of his temporary residence. He fled from one to another, in hope to escape the fiend that pursued him. He left Richmond in October, 1849, to go North. But in Baltimore temptation assailed him, and he succumbed. He wandered about the city for five days in a state of intoxication. He was found unconscious, clad like a beggar in soiled and tattered garments, in a place of disreputable resort, and was taken to a hospital, where for two whole days he suffered the agonies of delirium tremens, and talked incessantly to spectral and imaginary objects on the walls. Then came two more days of alternate violence and of collapse from exhaustion, in which he cried that his best friend would be one who would blow out his wretched brains. At last, at three o'clock on a Tuesday morning, he moved his head gently, uttered the words, "Lord, help my poor soul!" and expired.

We have no other record of prayer or recognition of God's existence but this, in all Poe's life. He used the word "God," indeed, in his poems, but it was only as a conventional and rhetorical accommodation to the beliefs of his readers. He *thought* himself, and, as

nearly as it was possible for any man to be, he *was*, an atheist. But are there in this world any real atheists? Theoretically, yes; practically, no. In practice, all men show by their language, actions, and expectations that they have the idea of a Being above them, upon whom they are dependent, who is their standard of truth, beauty, and goodness, and who imposes law upon their moral natures. But in theory, men may ignore or even deny that they have any idea of such a Being, and may believe such an idea to be self-contradictory and irrational. The only way in which we can convince these unbelievers is by appealing to their underlying convictions, and by showing them that they practically admit what they theoretically deny. Poe's restlessness of soul, his tormenting conscience, his impotence of will, his frantic appeals to women to rescue him from degradation, his dreadful fears of death and the grave, were evidences that deep down in his heart was an inextinguishable belief in a just God with whom he was at enmity and whom he feared to meet in the judgment.

Poe's atheism was an atheism of the heart, rather than an atheism of the head. He lacked the will to believe. The secret of professed atheism is really a dislike for the character and the requirements of God. Theism humbles man's pride, implies his dependence, as a creature and as a sinner. He is willing to believe in self; why will he not believe in God? "Belief," as Emerson says, "consists in accepting the affirmations of the soul; unbelief, in rejecting them." But acceptance or rejection is determined by the will. Since neither theism nor atheism can be proved, we choose

the alternative which we prefer. Do we wish a God to exist? Then we may believe in his existence, and our faith will justify itself by its results. We ask the atheist to trust the voice of his own nature, and to make experiment as to its truth. We claim that this is the method of science. Science assumes nature and her laws at the start, but verification comes with every successive step. Religion, in like manner, assumes God's existence at the beginning, but each following experience furnishes new evidence that the assumption is correct. Poe was too proud to take this childlike attitude toward the truth. "My whole nature utterly revolts," he exclaimed, "at the idea that there is any Being in the universe superior to myself!" And so this confessed liar, slanderer, gambler, and drunkard, if not also a forger and a seducer, deified self and turned his back upon his only Lord and Redeemer. Conceit of his own powers and his own worth so blinded him that Infinite Truth and Goodness made no impression upon him. Self was the only God he believed or served or worshiped. In this respect he furnishes, among all our poets, the most perfect illustration of the insanity of sin. And yet he did not know himself to be a sinner, for his physician quotes him as saying: "By the God who reigns in heaven, I swear to you that my soul is incapable of dishonor. I can call to mind no act of my life which would bring a blush to my cheek."

It might at first sight seem vain to speak of such a man's theology. But every man has a theology. He is compelled to reflect upon the facts of the universe, and upon his own relations to the power above him

upon which he is dependent. Even if he is a professed atheist, he is driven by an accusing conscience to self-justification. He must give a reason for the very unbelief that is in him. Poe has declared his theology in his prose poem entitled "Eureka." He regarded it as the greatest work of his life, and that by which he would be especially remembered. He thought it of more importance than Sir Isaac Newton's discovery of gravitation. It was a materialistic explanation of the universe, its origin, development, and destiny. He propounded it with amazing confidence, and proposed an edition of fifty thousand copies as a mere beginning. It was but the shallow and half-crazy dream of a sciolist who had cribbed his slender basis of facts, and from a single primitive assumption had deduced a universe without a God. It deserves no prolonged study, yet it furnishes such a clue to his theory of poetry that I cannot avoid a brief notice of its doctrine. Dreamy and unscientific as it is, it shows conclusively that theories of the universe are too often constructed to excuse men's practical disobedience to God. And the results of Poe's theory in his own case show that, instead of being God's truth, it was a devil's lie to ensnare and destroy him. While the assumption of God's existence ennobles and saves, the assumption of a godless universe leads only to intellectual and moral ruin.

Poe was an absolute materialist. He regarded mind as only an etherealized and sensitive form of matter. Body and mind go hand in hand, and are never separated. Whenever he speaks of God, and of God's volition, we must remember that it is a material God

that he has in mind, and that the conception and act of such a God are indistinguishable from merely physical instinct. "Is not God immaterial?" he asks. He replies: "There is no immateriality. That which is not matter is not at all. . . There are gradations of matter of which man knows nothing"—and he speaks of electricity as if this answered to his conception of a material God. "Matter, unparticled, indivisible, one, permeating all things, and impelling all things, this matter is God. . . Thinking is the motion of this matter. . . God, with all the powers attributed to spirit, is but the perfection of matter." The universe has originated, he declares, in the creation by this God of a single particle of matter. How a material God was capable of a creative volition he does not inform us. This material particle had powers of radiation and multiplication. It was diffused through a vast though limited region of space. The originating principle acted continuously in each portion of the matter into which the particle had become divided, and the result was the various bodies, molecular and molar, of the great system. The first element in the universe then was repulsion; and this is nothing but mind or spirit in expression. The original unity has thus become multiplicity. But diffusion and multiplicity do not of themselves provide for progress. Progress can be secured only by partial return to unity. The original diffusive or repulsive force is therefore to some extent withdrawn, and attraction takes its place. Gravitation follows upon radiation, and attraction is body, as repulsion was mind or spirit. So we have multiplicity resulting in mind, and unity resulting in body. But the


return to the unity must go on, until all things are again resolved into the original simplicity. What was originally one must become one again. Separation of intelligences must give place to unification of intelligence. As each mind was only a portion of the one Being whom we call God, so each mind must be absorbed in that One and lose its separate identity. There is no such thing as personal immortality. But our compensation is that, as we are now only portions of God, we shall hereafter take all creation into union with ourselves, and so shall ourselves become God. In a note appended to his own copy of "Eureka," Poe wrote:

The pain of the consideration that we shall lose our identity ceases at once when we further reflect that the process, as above described, is neither more nor less than that of the absorption, by each individual intelligence, of all other intelligences (that is, of the Universe) into its own. That God may be all in all, each must become God.

This fantastic and self-deifying scheme does not end with the present universe to which we belong. There are many universes, both in space and in time, and there are as many nature-gods to match them. The tendency to unity belongs to all. But this tendency is only a blind physical impulse which is misnamed when it is called spiritual. It presents to us endless cycles of birth and death, of growth and decay. It is pantheistic and polytheistic by turns, but it is never theistic. Its so-called God has no eye to pity and no arm to save. The beauty which it sees in the universe is only the phosphorescent glow which marks in the darkness a mound of corruption. It gives no real

explanation of the origin or the progress of the system, since its God is only material force, without designing intelligence and without love for his creatures. It makes the universe a reaction upon will, instead of being itself will. Human will is mere illusion; man is a victim instead of an actor; and Poe deals with crime against man, but never with sin against God. Morality becomes mere convention. In such a universe the best we can do is to plod on, yielding to our every impulse and bearing the penalty of mistakes. Conscience rejects such a scheme as contradicting our moral nature; our noblest aspirations rise in rebellion against such hopeless subjection of the spirit; and Christ's positive revelation of life and immortality make Poe's seem only a madman's dream. In fact, he confesses the futility of his own philosophy when he writes: "My forlorn and darkened nature is full of forebodings. Nothing cheers or comforts me. The future looks a dreary blank. But I will struggle on and hope against hope." The dreamer dwelt already in an Inferno like that which Dante pictured in his "Divine Comedy," and the horrors of which are portrayed by Michelangelo in his "Last Judgment."


"Eureka" has been called "a prevision of the modern doctrine of evolution." It certainly reminds us of Herbert Spencer's process from homogeneity to heterogeneity. But it is not original with Poe. It merely reflects the nebular hypothesis of Laplace, and the first suggestion of it may have come to Poe in his childhood. Whitty, in his Memoir of Poe, tells us that John Allan, Poe's guardian, was a rather liberal thinker, and suggests that the germ out of which the



poet's later materialism was developed may have come from this source. "There seems an autobiographical hint of this in his tale 'The Domain of Arnheim' which he has said contains 'much of his soul.' I think he wrote:"

Some peculiarities, either in his early education, or in the nature of his intellect, had tinged with what is termed materialism all his ethical speculations; and it was this, perhaps, which led him to believe that the most advantageous field, at least, if not the sole legitimate field for the poetic exercise lies in the creation of novel moods of purely *physical* loneliness.

It is certain that Poe's scheme of the universe greatly influenced his ideas of poetry as well as of life. He was a worshiper of beauty, and in his scheme of the universe beauty has no relation to truth or to goodness; or rather, he would say, beauty is itself truth and goodness, and there is no truth or goodness without beauty. Truth and goodness are merely by-product of beauty; beauty is the standard by which truth and goodness are to be measured; beauty itself has no standard of measurement, but is to measure all things. This is to reverse all right rules. Poe's denial of a rational Ordainer and Upholder of the universe renders his judgments irrational. Beauty, like truth and goodness, implies a standard to which it conforms. There must be a God to justify our sense of beauty, as well as our confidence in our mental processes and our conviction of moral obligation. The universe is a thought, an ordered whole, a moral system; there must be a Thinker, a Designer, a Lawgiver, as the Author, Upholder, Ruler, of our mental and moral life. And w





is true in the intellectual and moral realm is equally true in the esthetic realm. Beauty is conformity to a standard, and that standard is the eternal Beauty in God. But in him it is "the beauty of holiness," and is never separated from truth and goodness. Poe sought beauty apart from God—but such beauty appeals only to transitory and irrational emotion; it cannot justify itself to reason; it is seductive and delusive; it glorifies the evil as well as the good; it is pessimistic and degrading; it ceases to be beauty, by cutting loose from the true and the good, and by making itself supreme.

Poe was "the wild poet" who exemplified these false principles of ethics. He claimed that the awakening of emotion is the sole aim of poetry. Emotion, he would say, is awakened only by beauty; truth and goodness are incidental, and never primary. There is no thrill of emotion like that of hopeless sorrow, and the death of a loved and beautiful woman marks the acme of human grief. Add now the pain of parting and the horror of the tomb; picture these in verse of penetrating melody, and you have the essentials of poetry. But who does not see that the ideal element has been lost? True poetry presupposes a divine order, and a worthy end, in the universe. There can be no great poetry without faith. Optimism, and not pessimism, must be at the heart of melody, or melody becomes funereal and repulsive. I can best show what I mean by quoting the poem in which Poe's philosophy is most vividly and perfectly represented. The title of the poem is highly significant. It is "The Conqueror Worm."

Lo! 't is a gala night  
Within the lonesome latter years.  
An angel throng, bewinged, bedight  
In veils, and drowned in tears,  
Sit in a theater to see  
A play of hopes and fears,  
While the orchestra breathes fitfully  
The music of the spheres.

Mimes, in the form of God on high,  
Mutter and mumble low,  
And hither and thither fly;  
Mere puppets they, who come and go  
At bidding of vast formless things  
That shift the scenery to and fro,  
Flapping from out their condor wings  
Invisible Woe.

That motley drama—oh, be sure  
It shall not be forgot!  
With its Phantom chased for evermore  
By a crowd that seize it not,  
Through a circle that ever returneth in  
To the self-same spot;  
And much of Madness, and more of Sin,  
And Horror the soul of the plot.

But see amid the mimic rout  
A crawling shape intrude:  
A blood-red thing that writhes from out  
The scenic solitude!  
It writhes—it writhes!—with mortal pangs  
The mimes become its food,  
And seraphs sob at vermin fangs  
In human gore imbued.

Out—out are the lights—out all!  
And over each quivering form  
The curtain, a funeral pall,  
Comes down with the rush of a storm,

While the angels, all pallid and wan,  
Uprising, unveiling, affirm  
That the play is the tragedy, "Man,"  
And its hero, the Conqueror Worm.

Here is melody and the thrill of emotion, but all in the interest of a godless universe and a hopeless humanity. Here is imagination, but only of the bizarre and the gruesome. The unbelieving poet can construct only a universe of sorrow and of death. Death indeed is the annihilation of personal and conscious existence, and is the only hope of mortals. In his poem "For Annie" he writes:

Thank Heaven! the crisis,  
The danger, is past,  
And the lingering illness  
Is over at last,  
And the fever called "Living"  
Is conquered at last.

Man is "a puppet, cast in the form of God," and conquered by the "Conqueror Worm."

Poe's imagination had only limited range. His moral nature was too self-centered to give him any proper view of human life or destiny. He reveled in the abnormal and revolting incidents of our existence. The grim, the weird, the spectral, the terrible, impressed him most. These left his appetite for beauty unsatisfied; and his best poetry is the expression of disappointed hopes and of everlasting regrets. There are three essays which will live when his "Eureka" is forgotten—essays in which he exhibits unusual powers of analysis and sanity of judgment, and which notwithstanding reveal the shortcomings of his art.

The first is entitled "The Poetic Principle." Poetry, he maintains, is the result of man's struggle to apprehend the supernal Loveliness and to penetrate into the mystery that surrounds us. It is the rhythmical creation of Beauty. Its object is the pleasurable excitement of the soul by our recombination of the images found in nature. But, since human effort always fails to realize the ideal after which it strives, there must in all true poetry be an element of sorrow. A "certain taint of sadness is inseparably connected with all the higher manifestations of true Beauty." Since poetry aims to rouse and to elevate the emotions, it is "independent of that Truth which is the satisfaction of the Reason." The didactic and the moral are foreign to the realm of poetry. It is more nearly allied to music than to any other art. Poe was not a musician, like Lanier; and Lanier improved upon Poe's theory. But Poe exemplifies his own doctrine by verse so dainty and sweet, that it enchains our attention and persuades us against our wills. He dealt in "the witchery of words." He caught from Negro minstrelsy the telling effect of the refrain. His finished poems were works of endless elaboration, in which every stroke is effective, and the whole product tends from the beginning to a predestined end. His poem "The Bells" shows him, at his best, as the melodist and literary artist:

Hear the sledges with the bells,  
Silver bells!  
What a world of merriment their melody foretells!  
How they tinkle, tinkle, tinkle,  
In the icy air of night!  
While the stars, that oversprinkle

All the heavens, seem to twinkle  
 With a crystalline delight;  
 Keeping time, time, time,  
 In a sort of Runic rhyme,  
 To the tintinnabulation that so musically wells  
 From the bells, bells, bells, bells,  
 Bells, bells, bells,—  
 From the jingling and the tinkling of the bells.

Then we hear "the mellow wedding-bells:" But these  
 are followed by "the loud alarm bells":

In the startled ear of night  
 How they scream out their affright!  
 Too much horrified to speak,  
 They can only shriek, shriek,  
 Out of tune,  
 In a clamorous appealing to the mercy of the fire,  
 In a mad expostulation with the deaf and frantic fire,

. . . . .  
 Oh, the bells, bells, bells!  
 What a tale their terror tells  
 Of Despair!  
 How they clang, and clash, and roar!  
 What a horror they outpour  
 On the bosom of the palpitating air!

And finally come the funeral bells. Here Poe is at  
 home, for beyond death he has no vision of Him who  
 is the Resurrection and the Life:

Hear the tolling of the bells,  
 Iron bells!  
 What a world of solemn thought their monody compels!  
 In the silence of the night  
 How we shiver with affright  
 At the melancholy menace of their tone!  
 For every sound that floats  
 From the rust within their throats  
 Is a groan.

And the people—ah, the people,  
 They that dwell up in the steeple,  
     All alone,  
 And who tolling, tolling, tolling  
     In that muffled monotone,  
 Feel a glory in so rolling  
     On the human heart a stone—  
 They are neither man nor woman,  
 They are neither brute nor human,  
     They are Ghouls:  
 And their king it is who tolls;  
 And he rolls, rolls, rolls,  
     Rolls  
     A pæan from the bells;  
 And his merry bosom swells  
     With the pæan of the bells,  
 And he dances, and he yells:  
 Keeping time, time, time,  
 In a sort of Runic rhyme,  
     . . . . .  
 To the moaning and the groaning of the bells.

The second of Poe's didactic essays has for its subject "The Philosophy of Composition." I regard this as one of the most thoughtful and instructive papers ever written by an American. It may well be set side by side with Herbert Spencer's essay on style, in which he propounds the principle that its greatest essential is economy of the reader's or hearer's attention—the more energy is expended upon the form, the less there remains to grapple with the substance. Poe declares that every work of literary art must be written backward; the writer must first know his *terminus ad quem*; analysis must come before synthesis; the essay must be a gradual approach to a conclusion perfectly defined in the author's mind, but only by successive steps made known to the reader. The element of

surprise is necessary to success; attention must be gained, and kept, till the *dénouement* caps the climax and satisfies the mind. Here is a principle of universal application, and writers of note do consciously or unconsciously observe it. Poe does us a great service by illustrating the principle in his composition of "The Raven." I dismiss, as already considered, his theory that melancholy is the noblest and most legitimate of the poetical tones; that is only his inference from a godless and hopeless universe. I dismiss also his view that the true poem must always be a brief one, for this view rests upon the premise that poetry appeals, never to reason, but only to fleeting emotion: the epic may satisfy our minds, not only by its successive scenes, but by the unity of their sequence and development. And finally I dismiss his doctrine of the refrain, as unquestionably possessing originality and value. I call attention only to the fact that the last word of the poem is the first in the poet's mind as he begins to construct his work. And that word is "Nevermore."

The subject of the poem is hopeless sorrow, and the word "nevermore" expresses it. But that word must have a speaker. Who feels such sorrow more than the lover, the object of whose affection has been snatched from his side? What shall be the locality of his grief? It must be the solitude of his study. How can "Nevermore" be uttered in an endless monotone? Only a non-reasoning being is capable of such heartless reiteration. The parrot is the flippant bird of day; only the raven is the speaking bird of night. How shall the lover and the raven be brought together? There must be a tempestuous night, and the flapping of the raven's

wings seems to be a knocking at the door. The opening of the door admits the sable visitor. The raven enters to find refuge from the storm, and perches upon the bust of Pallas over the chamber door. The lover begins by jesting at the strange apparition, and by asking questions. But soon he is mystified and solemnized. To all his successive inquiries the bird makes but one reply: it is the ominous "Nevermore." And the result is only the deepening of the mystery and the sorrow of death. As a lesson in literary workmanship, this poem is unique and invaluable, and that without our deciding how far in Poe's case the process of composition was conscious or unconscious. "The Raven" is his masterpiece, and, as uniting his melody and his melancholy, it may be regarded as one of the great works of American literature—a work as wonderful and as perfect as Gray's "Elegy in a Country Churchyard." For that reason, I may be permitted to quote from it several of its most significant stanzas:

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and  
weary,  
Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore,—  
While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tap-  
ping,  
As of some one gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door.  
"T is some visitor," I muttered, "tapping at my chamber  
door:

Only this, and nothing more."

. . . . .

Open here I flung the shutter, when, with many a flirt and  
flutter,  
In there stepped a stately Raven of the saintly days of yore.  
Not the least obeisance made he; not a minute stopped or  
stayed he;



But, with mien of lord or lady, perched above my chamber  
door,  
Perched upon a bust of Pallas just above my chamber door:  
Perched, and sat, and nothing more.

Then this ebony bird beguiling my sad fancy into smiling  
By the grave and stern decorum of the countenance it wore,—  
"Though thy crest be shorn and shaven, thou," I said, "art  
sure no craven,  
Ghastly grim and ancient Raven wandering from the Nightly  
shore:  
Tell me what thy lordly name is on the Night's Plutonian  
shore!"

Quoth the Raven, "Nevermore."

"Prophet!" said I, "thing of evil! prophet still, if bird or  
devil!  
Whether Tempter sent, or whether tempest tossed thee here  
ashore,  
Desolate yet all undaunted, on this desert land enchanted—  
On this home by Horror haunted—tell me truly, I implore:  
Is there—is there balm in Gilead?—tell me—tell me, I  
implore!"

Quoth the Raven, "Nevermore."

"Prophet!" said I, "thing of evil—prophet still, if bird or  
devil!  
By that Heaven that bends above us, by that God we both  
adore,  
Tell this soul with sorrow laden if, within the distant  
Aidenn,  
It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels name  
Lenore:  
Clasp a rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name  
Lenore!"

Quoth the Raven, "Nevermore."

"Be that word our sign of parting, bird or fiend!" I shrieked,  
upstarting:  
"Get thee back into the tempest and the Night's Plutonian  
shore!"

Leave no black plume as a token of that lie thy soul hath  
spoken!

Leave my loneliness unbroken! quit the bust above my door!  
Take thy beak from out my heart, and take thy form from off  
my door!"

Quoth the Raven, "Nevermore."

And the Raven, never flitting, still is sitting, still is sitting,  
On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door;  
And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon's that is dream-  
ing,

And the lamp-light o'er him streaming throws his shadow on  
the floor:

And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the  
floor

Shall be lifted—nevermore!

Here is mastery of the technique of verse, and a musical refrain, the impression of which deepens to the very end. But there is also a gathering gloom that chills and affrights. Is this the noblest poetry? Not unless it most truly represents life. Such predetermined sadness is irrational, for hopeless sorrow denies the reality of a divine providence and gives the lie to God's word. It declares that there is no "balm in Gilead," and that Christ has died in vain. Poe was as much a pagan, as if he had never heard of the Cross. He sorrowed as those without hope. He did not see that "the last enemy that shall be abolished is death," and that our God and Saviour has made death to be the gateway to eternal life. Poe's poetry is therefore as unmoral and misleading as if written in the interests of vice. It tempts men, by reaction, to say, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." I acquit our poet of any conscious pandering to immorality. If there is any condoning or glorifying of

illicit passion, it is veiled and unintentional. But to remove all hope from humanity is to doom it to death. Despair leads men into sin as often as does the desire for pleasure. And I must regard the quenching of the light of hope as a vicious element in Poe's poetry.

" The Rationale of Verse " is a third essay in which our poet attempts a scientific exposition of rhythm, rhyme, meter, and versification. Here too, he has shown his best powers, and has done great service to his art. His account of the genesis of prosody is novel and interesting. He holds that the rudiment of verse is found in the spondee—equality of sound in two accented syllables. Then the perception of monotone gives rise to an attempt at its relief: the iambus and the trochee are results. Dactylic and anapaestic words naturally follow; and then the line, which first curtails and then defines the length of a sequence. If lines are to be defined to the ear, equality in sound of the final syllables is needed, and hence arises rhyme. The beginnings of rhyme are found in Aristophanes and in Horace, and Dr. Charles A. Briggs has maintained that it is not wanting even in Genesis 4 : 23, 24 and in the Psalms. The stanza gives limitation and unity to lines. The refrain relieves their monotony. It is impossible in this article even to summarize Poe's doctrine. Suffice it to say that he has propounded an original and profound theory of versification—a theory which frees the subject from much superstitious pedantry of the past, and which permits the poet to follow more readily the promptings of the Muse. Of all our poets he has given most scientific expression to the technique of his art.

As a last illustration of Poe's theory that poetry is a metrical appeal to emotion—an appeal skilfully adapted to awaken yearning and regret—let me quote his poem entitled " The Haunted Palace ":

In the greenest of our valleys  
By good angels tenanted,  
Once a fair and stately palace—  
Radiant palace—reared its head.  
In the monarch Thought's dominion,  
It stood there;  
Never seraph spread a pinion  
Over fabric half so fair!

Banners yellow, glorious, golden,  
On its roof did float and flow  
(This—all this—was in the olden  
Time long ago),  
And every gentle air that dallied,  
In that sweet day,  
Along the ramparts plumed and pallid,  
A wingèd odor went away.

Wanderers in that happy valley,  
Through two luminous windows saw  
Spirits moving musically,  
To a lute's well-tuned law,  
Round about a throne where, sitting,  
Porphyrogene,  
In state his glory well befitting,  
The ruler of the realm was seen.

And all with pearl and ruby glowing  
Was the fair palace door,  
Through which came flowing, flowing, flowing,  
And sparkling evermore,  
A troop of Echoes, whose sweet duty  
Was but to sing,  
In voices of surpassing beauty,  
The wit and wisdom of their king.

But evil things, in robes of sorrow,  
Assailed the monarch's high estate;  
(Ah, let us mourn, for never morrow  
Shall dawn upon him desolate!)  
And round about his home the glory  
That blushed and bloomed,  
Is but a dim-remembered story  
Of the old time entombed.

And travellers now within that valley,  
Through the red-litten windows see  
Vast forms that move fantastically  
To a discordant melody;  
While, like a ghastly rapid river,  
Through the pale door  
A hideous throng rush out forever,  
And laugh—but smile no more.

“The Haunted Palace” is a picture of Poe’s own soul. It reminds us of “The Living Temple” by the Puritan John Howe. That represents human nature as originally a magnificent temple in which God dwelt and manifested his glory. But the priests were faithless and the spoiler came; it was deserted by Deity, and only broken column and fallen architrave remained to show its former splendor; it came to be the haunt of unclean birds, and evil spirits congregated in its courts. But God did not forsake the work of his own hands; at infinite cost he began to restore the ruined temple; he will not cease his effort until he has rescued it from his foes and has filled it with his praise. But the palace of Poe’s soul was still in possession of fiends, and he had no hope of recovering the glory he had lost. Exquisite literary art witnessed to the greatness of his original endowment, but with this art there was bound up a pessimistic unbelief that

shut out all the light of heaven and left him a prey to remorse and despair. His life and work teach us that true poetry is born only of true character; that beauty cannot be divorced from truth; that art for art's sake is the ruin of art itself; and that obedience to God and acceptance of his revelation in Christ are the only means of restoring lost character or of opening to us the treasures of the universe.

No one of our poets has had so many memoirs written of him, and about no other has been waged such warfare of opinion. Emerson calls him "the jingle-man"; Henry James thinks his verses "valueless"; Brownell regards him as "a conjurer in literature and a charlatan," "our only Ishmael" among the poets, and "our solitary artist." But Tennyson is quoted by Brander Matthews as ranking Poe "highest among American poets—not unworthy to stand beside Catullus, the most melodious of the Latins, and Heine,<sup>4</sup> the most tuneful of the Germans." Gosse calls Poe the first of American writers; and Beyer declares that "he excels all English writers since Milton in the equality of his artistry in both the great forms of expression, prose and poetry." Each of these parties has much to say for itself, and our judgment between them cannot be an unqualified one. Poe is certainly great in form. But a haunting melody is not the highest poetry. Substance must equal form, or the mind is unsatisfied. Truth and goodness must furnish that substance. Every human work must ultimately come before Christ as its Judge. Let us ask how Christ judges even now. It is the purpose of these essays to weigh our poets in the balances of the sanctuary, and

to estimate their moral and religious significance. We may grant to Poe a technical skill and musical cadence as great as Swinburne's, while we find in him a bitter and defiant melancholy like that of Byron. Lauvriere calls him "the poet of the outcast soul." Andrew Lang calls his poetry "the echo of a lyre from behind the hills of death"—yes, we add, from the Inferno of sin and guilt and despair—and such poetry is melody without truth and without love.

I close my essay with two quotations. The first is from Griswold, Poe's chosen literary executor, who knew him best and formed the most unbiased judgment of his life: Poe, says Griswold,

"Was at all times a dreamer—dwelling in ideal realms peopled with the creatures and the accidents of his brain. He walked the streets, in madness or melancholy, with lips moving in indistinct curses, or with eyes upturned in passionate prayer (never for himself, for he felt, or professed to feel, that he was already damned, but) for their happiness who at the moment were objects of his idolatry; or, with his glances introverted to a heart gnawed with anguish, and with a face shrouded in gloom, he would brave the wildest storms; and all night, with drenched garments and arms beating the winds and rains, would speak as if to spirits that at such times only could be evoked by him from the Aidenn, close by whose portals his disturbed soul sought to forget the ills to which his constitution subjected him—close by the Aidenn where were those he loved—the Aidenn which he might never see but in fitful glimpses, as its gates opened to receive the less fiery and more happy natures whose destiny to sin did not involve the doom of death.

"He seemed, except when some fitful pursuit subjugated his will and engrossed his faculties, always to bear the memory of some controlling sorrow. The remarkable poem of 'The Raven' was probably much more nearly than has been supposed, even by those who were very intimate with him, a reflection and an echo of his own history. *He* was that bird's

—'unhappy master whom unmerciful Disaster  
Followed fast and followed faster till his songs one burden  
bore:

Till the dirges of his Hope that melancholy burden bore  
Of "Never—nevermore."

"Every genuine author, in a greater or less degree, leaves in his works, whatever their design, traces of his personal character: elements of his immortal being, in which the individual survives the person. While we read the pages of 'The Fall of the House of Usher,' or of 'Mesmeric Revelations,' we see in the solemn and stately gloom which invests one, and in the subtle metaphysical analysis of both, indications of the idiosyncrasies—of what was most remarkable and peculiar—in the author's intellectual nature. But we see here only the better phases of his nature, only the symbols of his juster action; for his harsh experience had deprived him of all faith, in man or woman. He had made up his mind upon the numberless complexities of the social world, and the whole system with him was an imposture. This conviction gave a direction to his shrewd and naturally unamiable character. Still, though he regarded society as composed altogether of villains, the sharpness of his intellect was not of that kind which enabled him to cope with villainy, while it continually caused him by overshoots to fail of the success of honesty. He was in many respects like Francis Vivian, in Bulwer's novel of 'The Caxtons.' Passion, in him, comprehended many of the worst emotions which militate against human happiness. You could not contradict him, but you raised quick choler; you could not speak of wealth, but his cheek paled with gnawing envy. The astonishing natural advantages of this poor boy—his beauty, his readiness, the daring spirit that breathed around him like a fiery atmosphere—had raised his constitutional self-confidence into an arrogance that turned his very claims to admiration into prejudices against him. Irascible, envious—bad enough, but not the worst—for these salient angles were all varnished over with a cold repellent cynicism—his passions vented themselves in sneers. There seemed in him no moral susceptibility; and, what was more remarkable in a proud nature, little or nothing of the true point of honor. He had, to a



morbid excess, that desire to rise which is vulgarly called ambition, but no wish for the esteem or the love of his species—only the hard wish to succeed—not shine, not serve—succeed, that he might have the right to despise a world which galled his self-conceit."

And my last quotation is from Tennyson's "Palace of Art." His picture of the unbelieving soul who in that habitation enthrones herself seems a description of Poe's ambition and of Poe's end:

" 'I take possession of man's mind and deed.  
I care not what the sects may brawl.  
I sit as God holding no form of creed,  
But contemplating all.'  
. . . . .

" Full oft the riddle of the painful earth  
Flash'd thro' her as she sat alone,  
Yet not the less held she her solemn mirth,  
And intellectual throne.

" And so she throve and prosper'd; so three years  
She prosper'd; on the fourth she fell,  
Like Herod, when the shout was in his ears,  
Struck thro' with pangs of hell.

" Lest she should fail and perish utterly,  
God, before whom ever lie bare  
The abysmal deeps of personality,  
Plagued her with sore despair.  
. . . . .

" Deep dread and loathing of her solitude  
Fell on her, from which mood was born  
Scorn of herself; again, from out that mood  
Laughter at her self-scorn.

" 'What! is not this my place of strength,' she said,  
'My spacious mansion built for me,  
Whereof the strong foundation-stones were laid  
Since my first memory?'

" But in dark corners of her palace stood  
Uncertain shapes; and unawares  
On white-eyed phantasms weeping tears of blood  
And horrible nightmares,

" And hollow shades enclosing hearts of flame,  
And, with dim fretted foreheads all,  
On corpses three-months-old at noon she came  
That stood against the wall.

. . . . .

" She, mouldering with the dull earth's mouldering  
Inwrapt tenfold in slothful shame,  
Lay there exiled from eternal God,  
Lost to her place and name;

" And death and life she hated equally,  
And nothing saw, for her despair,  
But dreadful time, dreadful eternity,  
No comfort anywhere;

. . . . .

" She howl'd aloud, ' I am on fire within.  
There comes no murmur of reply.  
What is it that will take away my sin,  
And save me lest I die? ' "

Did Poe, in his last hour, feel his need of  
mercy? Let us hope that this was his meaning  
he cried, " Lord, help my poor soul! " and  
that He who had mercy upon the penitent  
mercy upon him.

V


HENRY WADSWORTH  
LONGFELLOW



## HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW


THAT is a great day in one's history when he gets his first view of the beauty and the mystery of poetry. Far-reaching vistas open before him—a new world of wonder and delight. The poet who awakens his soul to see what the poet himself saw, and so creates in him the poetic instinct, becomes to him a sort of demigod, and is worshiped forever after. I begin my essay on Longfellow with vivid recollection of the admiration, and even awe, with which he first inspired me. He introduced me to literature, and gave me the freedom of the mind. His "Psalm of Life" encouraged me to think that I too might make my life sublime. And what he did for me he did for a multitude of others. The excellent biography written by Samuel Longfellow, his brother, gives extracts from many letters of men well known, which show that the poet's early productions were germs from which sprang a great literary harvest.

My purpose in this essay, however, is to disclose even a larger influence of Longfellow than this upon individual writers. His influence was national. He rose to fame in a time of comparative uncouthness and mediocrity. We were too young for literary elegance, and too practical to appreciate ideal creations.



Longfellow bridged the gulf between us and the past, between us and Europe, between us and the whole world of romance. He was one of the first to profit by absorbing foreign culture and by importing it into America. His liberal, loving, sympathetic spirit was a garden-plot in which plants hitherto exotic were nourished for distribution over our whole broad commonwealth. If Bryant was the father of American poetry, Longfellow was as certainly its first cultivator and enricher. With a broader view of life than Bryant's, a finer sense of form than Emerson's, a keener apprehension of ideal beauty than Whittier's, a sounder morality than Poe's, he was our first all-round poet and teacher of poetry, and of all our American poets the most beloved.

The true poet is born, not made, and he owes much to his ancestry. Providence ordained that Longfellow should come of good stock. His father was a lawyer of integrity and courtesy, social and public-spirited, a graduate of Harvard College and a genuine scholar. He was so highly esteemed that his fellow citizens chose him to be their representative in Congress. The government of the family was kindly, but strict. The father kept watch over his children's education, criticizing their youthful productions, and directing their thoughts to God, as their Creator, Preserver, and Friend. From his mother our poet probably derived his gifts of imagination and of sympathy. She was beautiful in person and gracious in demeanor. In her early days she was fond of gaiety. Music and dancing had great attractions for her. She loved nature also, even in its wilder and more sublime aspects, and thun-



der-storms were her delight. But she was, above all, a woman of old-fashioned piety; though her love of Bible and sermon and psalm was accompanied by interest in romance and by endless ministrations to the poor. She was the confidante of her children, the corrector of their faults, but also the recipient of their joyful and hopeful confessions. If parentage alone could make a poet, Longfellow was in this respect richly blest.

It is also true that the poet is made, and not born. He owes as much to nurture as he owes to nature. Who shall say how much of Longfellow's power was the fruit of his environment and of his education? His poem, "My Lost Youth," is a memorial of the strong influence exerted upon him by his home in Portland, his outlook over Casco Bay, and his wandering in Deering's Woods. Casco Bay, in full view of Portland, was the scene of a naval battle in the war of 1812, upon which the boy of five years gazed with wonder, and the impression of which he never lost:

I remember the sea-fight far away,  
 How it thundered o'er the tide!  
 And the dead captains, as they lay  
 In their graves, o'erlooking the tranquil bay  
 Where they in battle died.  
 And the sound of that mournful song  
 Goes through me with a thrill:  
 "A boy's will is the wind's will,  
 And the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts."

"The shadows of Deering's Woods," behind the town, were remembered as the scene of "friendships old" and "early loves":

And Deering's Woods are fresh and fair,  
And with joy that is almost pain  
My heart goes back to wander there,  
And among the dreams of the days that were,  
I find my lost youth again.  
And the strange and beautiful song,  
The groves are repeating it still:  
"A boy's will is the wind's will,  
And the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts."

He does well to close each stanza with two lines of that old Lapland song; for "the child is father of the man," and "beginnings make endings."

Nature and nurture act and react upon each other. The boy Longfellow inherited from his mother a sprightliness and impressibility which enamored him with singing and dancing. His father seems to have added a quiet and reserve of manner, which appeared in his avoidance of everything noisy or violent. As a schoolboy, he did work equal to that of classmates twice his age. He was a lover of books, and even thus early merited the characterization of a later critic who called him "the bookish Longfellow." His home was fairly well stocked with works of poetry and prose, and the boy devoured them. But the first book that fascinated him, and roused his ambition, was "The Sketch Book" of Washington Irving. "Whenever I open its pages," he says, "I open also that mysterious door which leads back into the haunted chambers of youth." And the first poet to whom he made allegiance was William Cullen Bryant. In his later years he acknowledges his indebtedness, and quotes Dante's address of gratitude to Vergil, "Thou art my master and my author."



At the age of fifteen Longfellow entered Bowdoin College at an advanced standing, and there at eighteen he was graduated. The institution had been founded only twenty years before, at Brunswick, twenty-five miles from his home in Portland. His father was one of its trustees. It had begun with but eight students, and a single building which was the residence of president and pupils alike. In our poet's time it was still a small college, but it had been adopted by the new State of Maine, and many distinguished citizens had sent their sons thither. James Bowdoin had presented it with a costly collection of paintings, drawings, and minerals—a collection which he had made in Europe, and which was finer than any other that America then possessed. Nathaniel Hawthorne was a member of Longfellow's class. He was a shy and reserved young man, then little known to his fellows, but with whom in after years our poet formed one of his warmest friendships. John S. C. Abbott was also a classmate; and Franklin Pierce, afterward President of the United States, was a student in the college. There was much of emulation and ambition in that little company, and it was here and now that both Longfellow and Hawthorne made their first ventures into the field of literature.

Biographers have not sufficiently noted the fact that Maine, in the early part of the nineteenth century, was still a home of the American Indian. Its lakes were full of trout, and its forests full of deer. The Penobscot or Passamaquoddy chief, in his paint and wampum and feathers, was a frequent visitor to the scattered villages; and, though he was somewhat tamed

and civilized, legends of his former savagery were rife at every fireside. Longfellow became interested in Indian life and manners; he read Heckewelder's "Account" of their history and customs; here was the germ of his future "Hiawatha." Now too, he begins to feel the poetic impulse and to write verses. But it is not the Algonquin or Ojibway chief who furnishes the theme; it is rather some maiden, of fairer complexion and tenderer spirit, who inspires the youthful poet. As a specimen of his earliest versifying, I may quote the first and the last stanzas of his poem addressed "To Ianthe":

When upon the western cloud  
Hang day's fading roses,  
When the linnet sings aloud  
And the twilight closes,—  
As I mark the moss-grown spring  
By the twisted holly,  
Pensive thoughts of thee shall bring  
Love's own melancholy.

. . . . .  
Then when tranquil evening throws  
Twilight shades above thee,  
And when early morning glows,—  
Think on those that love thee!  
For an interval of years  
We ere long must sever,  
But the hearts that love endears  
Shall be parted never.

The youth of eighteen was already seeking his vocation, and love-dreams gave place to preparation for the work of life. He had written many college poems, and some of them had been printed in the "United States Literary Gazette," published in Boston. He

wrote to his father that he eagerly aspired after future eminence in literature; "my whole soul," he says, "burns most ardently for it, and every earthly thought centers in it." But he counted the cost, and knew that acquaintance with other languages, and familiarity with their best authors, were an indispensable condition of success. At first he aimed only at a post-graduate year at Cambridge, with a view to the acquisition of Italian. Better things, however, were in store for him. His path was brightened, at his graduation, by an invitation from the board of trustees to the professorship of Modern Languages, for the establishment of which Madame Bowdoin had given to the college one thousand dollars. The invitation was coupled with a permission to spend three years in preparation, by residence abroad. It shows great confidence in his scholarly gifts, his teaching ability, and the soundness of his character, that such an invitation should be extended to a young man who had yet three years to spend before he reached his majority. The invitation was accepted with delight, and after some months of delay, during which he read law in his father's office, he set sail in an ocean packet for Europe.

Foreign travel was in those days far more rare than now. It was all the more a mark of distinction. For an American, it meant a widening of view, a release from narrow prejudices, an inspiration to better work. The sight of medieval cathedrals and palaces made the wooden architecture of his own country seem like the card-houses of children. Painting and sculpture revealed to him for the first time the glories of art. Other languages and literatures showed him

both the merits and the shortcomings of his own. The poverty and oppression of vast populations roused in him a new pride and gratitude, as he compared them with the free and well-to-do life of his native land. Perhaps the most important, however, of all the benefits of a prolonged stay abroad was his introduction to the past—the past of literature, politics, and history, and to that past the acquisition of foreign languages opened the door.

No young man ever entered the great European world with more of advantage than did young Longfellow. Delicate in all his tastes, a born hater of the rough and unseemly, ambitious and industrious, drinking in knowledge at every pore, provided with letters which admitted him at once to the society of litterateurs and diplomats, with a gentle and sincere address which made friends of all who met him, he found everywhere the very teachers and helpers of whom he stood in need. Paris, Madrid, Rome, Berlin, London, in turn, were the scene of his studies and associations. In Spain he made a bosom friend of Washington Irving; in Italy he had confidential talks with George W. Greene, the historian, whose letters are now a chief source of information with regard to our poet's inner life. In this historian's dedication to his friend of his "Life of General Greene," we read:

"Thirty-nine years ago, this month of April, you and I were together at Naples. . . We were young then, with life all before us; and in the midst of the records of a great past our thoughts would still turn to our own future. . . One day—I shall never forget it—we returned at sunset from a long afternoon amid the statues and relics of the Museo Bourbonico. . . We went up to the flat roof of the house, where, as we

walked, we could look down into the crowded street and out upon the wonderful bay and across to Ischia and Capri and Sorrento, and over the housetops and villas and vineyards to Vesuvius. . . And over all, with a thrill like that of solemn music, fell the splendor of the Italian sunset. We talked and mused by turns, till the twilight deepened and the stars came forth to mingle their mysterious influences with the overmastering magic of the scene. It was then that you unfolded to me your plans of life, and showed me from what 'deep cisterns' you had already learned to draw. From that day, the office of literature took a new place in my thoughts. I felt its forming power as I had never felt it before."

Three years of this wandering yet busy life made Longfellow a new man. Softened and enlarged in spirit, he came back to his own country, full of ambition to impart the culture which he had himself acquired. The little college became the theater of prelections and conversations in which French, German, and Italian were made to give up their treasures to American youth. He taught by example as well as by precept. He combined graciousness and dignity, a cheerful familiarity and serious intent to teach. No wonder that the stiff routine of college instruction received something of a shock, and that the new professor became exceedingly popular. In that day real comradeship between teachers and students was almost unknown. It was a great gain to have one professor who could sufficiently unbend to talk familiarly with his pupils about the things in which they were interested. Longfellow did something to introduce an improved method into American pedagogy.

He was not satisfied with influencing the narrow circle of the college. Wider fields invited him. An inner impulse to literary production had long possessed

him. It had been repressed by the thought that he lacked both ideas and power to express them. Now he determined to trust his destiny and to make the venture. His first impulse was to make his appeal to the public in prose, and Irving's "Sketch Book" suggested the general plan. It was in 1833, during the last of his five and a half years at Bowdoin, that he published "Outre-Mer." It crystallized what his years of travel had left in solution. The jottings of his diary furnished most of the material. We read "Outre-Mer" to-day with a sort of admiring curiosity; it has interest as a chapter in the history of literature; it would seem only an effusion of callow youth but for the occasional apparition in it of original genius. It is a medley of impressions, incidents, descriptions, and stories, with no more organic unity than that of Boccaccio's "Tales." But Longfellow, like Milton, had dedicated himself to literature, and this was his first offering to the Muse. It showed receptiveness of no ordinary sort; but the constructive period was yet to come.

Until now, his college experiences had been those of the courteous and popular schoolmaster. He looked upon his profession, he writes, "from a far nobler and more elevated point of view than many do. I take an inexpressible delight in watching the gradual dawn of intellect in the youthful mind." Little by little, however, the routine of teaching became burdensome, and he longed for greater freedom. His literary aspirations demanded more of leisure for original composition. He was forced to teach grammar, he says, when he would fain have written poems. A

larger outlook, with less of drudgery, presented itself when, in December, 1834, he was invited to succeed George Ticknor as Professor of Modern Languages at Harvard. Here too, he was permitted to spend a year in preparatory study abroad, and he accepted the new position gladly. But now he did not go to Europe alone. He had married Miss Mary Storer Potter, a Portland acquaintance of his earlier years, a young lady who knew her Greek and Latin, and whose gentle and affectionate disposition combined with beauty of countenance to make her markedly attractive. The one mishap of Longfellow's second stay in foreign ports was her sad death in Rotterdam. It was the first great sorrow of his life, and he has fitly commemorated it in his poem entitled "The Footsteps of Angels":

When the hours of Day are numbered,  
And the voices of the Night  
Wake the better soul, that slumbered,  
To a holy, calm delight;

Ere the evening lamps are lighted,  
And, like phantoms grim and tall,  
Shadows from the fitful firelight  
Dance upon the parlor wall;

Then the forms of the departed  
Enter at the open door;  
The beloved, the true-hearted,  
Come to visit me once more;

. . . . .

They, the holy ones and weakly,  
Who the cross of suffering bore,  
Folded their pale hands so meekly,  
Spake with us on earth no more!

And with them the Being Beauteous,  
 Who unto my youth was given,  
 More than all things else to love me,  
 And is now a saint in heaven.

With a slow and noiseless footstep  
 Comes that messenger divine,  
 Takes the vacant chair beside me,  
 Lays her gentle hand in mine.

And she sits and gazes at me  
 With those deep and tender eyes,  
 Like the stars, so still and saint-like,  
 Looking downward from the skies.

Uttered not, yet comprehended,  
 Is the spirit's voiceless prayer,  
 Soft rebukes, in blessings ended,  
 Breathing from her lips of air.

Oh, though oft depressed and lonely,  
 All my fears are laid aside,  
 If I but remember only  
 Such as these have lived and died!

The death of Longfellow's wife was the turning-point in his literary history. It gave him deeper views of life, and made him more original and constructive in his thinking. There is a marked difference between "Outre-Mer," published before his second European tour, and "Hyperion," printed after his return. The former has a careless if not a flippant gaiety, which often seems a mere overflow of youthful spirits. The latter is the serious attempt to depict a young man's striving after ideal excellence in thought and action. "Outre-Mer" is a chance collection of matters separately interesting, but bound together by no thread but



that of personal adventure. "Hyperion" is a connected tale; it rises to a much higher level of aspiration; it has a unity of conception, to which each part is subordinate and contributory. This change evinces in the author not only an intellectual but also a moral progress. Affliction has sobered and enriched him. He can now become the poet of domestic affection, and can describe joys and sorrows that are universal. To be a great poet, however, requires more than this; only the highest truth can enable him to understand the lowest; he needs to appreciate the facts of sin and redemption; in other words, to know human nature in its normal, and in its abnormal, relations to God.

It was the old Congregational Calvinism that prevailed at Brunswick and that dominated the college. We must concede that the federal theology, unaccompanied by an experience of vital union with Christ, was a theory of religion puzzling to the intellect and repugnant to the moral sense. Regarded as a merely forensic and governmental expression of historical and biological facts, it has justification; and, in the light of these, the Pauline doctrine of Scripture is comprehensible. But doctrine always tends to become traditional. After the religious revival under Jonathan Edwards had spent its force, there grew up a new scholasticism, which was more speculative than religious. Minor and incidental points of belief came to be insisted on, as if they were fundamental and essential to salvation. The younger generation refused to accept them. The result was the Unitarian defection. At the beginning, it might have been prevented by a greater tolerance and a less bigoted dogmatism on the part of orthodox

theologians. In the end, the movement reached its logical goal, and denial of inspiration, Trinity, and atonement, followed.

Longfellow's home influences had been those of the liberal sort. Traditional doctrine was already somewhat modified in the ministrations of the Portland pulpit, and his father had succeeded in securing some changes in the church's creed. Above all, that creed was interpreted by the Christlike lives of his father and his mother. At Bowdoin College, he was brought for the first time into an atmosphere of traditional orthodoxy, yet at the same time an atmosphere of inquiry. The young intellect of that day asked reasons for its faith. The minutiae of theology did not interest our eager student. He lacked as yet the inner experience that would make such questions absorbing. A sort of religious indifference took possession of him. His attendance at religious services became somewhat perfunctory. He longed for a more mild and ethical preaching; and when a Unitarian church was organized at Brunswick, he gave it whatever support lay within his power. There is little doubt that his enthusiastic willingness to accept a Harvard professorship was to some extent influenced by his desire to emerge into a freer theological, as well as a freer intellectual, field. From this time, Longfellow was an avowed Unitarian.

In his Inaugural Address at Bowdoin, he had given utterance to a far-reaching truth, in his characterization of the work he hoped to do. He perceived the religious bearings of that work, and spoke of the feeling that prompted it:

It is this *religious* feeling,—this changing of the finite for the infinite,—this grasping after the invisible things of another and a higher world,—which marks the spirit of modern literature.

What he thought that “religious feeling” to be, seems indicated in one of his early letters:

Human systems have done much to deaden the true spirit of devotion and to render religion merely speculative. Would it not be better for mankind if we should consider it as a cheerful and social companion, given us to go through life with us from childhood to the grave, and to make us happier here as well as hereafter; and not as a stern and chiding taskmaster, to whom we must cling at last through mere despair, because we have nothing else on earth to which we can cling? I love that view of Christianity which sets it in the light of a cheerful, kind-hearted friend, and which gives its thoughts a noble and a liberal turn. The doctrines of men have long been taught as the doctrines of an infinitely higher authority, and many have been led to think that faith without works is an active and saving principle.

Longfellow was by nature and by education a Pelagian. The problem of moral evil never seriously vexed him. Born and nurtured amid peaceful and moral surroundings, with a quiet and studious disposition, gentle and social in his ways, he never knew any deep conviction of sin, never felt the need of an atoning Saviour, never shrank from the holiness of God. Love, compassion, pity—these divine attributes seemed to him all-inclusive. That God is righteous, and that man is fallen, never made him tremble. The self-condemnation of Augustine, and his ecstatic praise for redemption, had no place in his experience. And yet, in a certain unevangelical way, he was a Christian poet. One of his earliest ambitions was that of writ-

ing a poem, the title of which should be " Christus," and in which apostolic, medieval, and modern Christianity should be exhibited in one great trilogy. This ambition haunted him for nearly half a century, but was not realized until 1873. The translation of Dante's " Divina Comedia " is another indication that our poet was in love with Christian themes. He never reached Dante's heights, because he had never sounded Dante's depths. It was only the superficial aspects of Christianity which he described. He did not understand the plan of God; but he did accept its results. Let us be thankful that, even so, he could give comfort to multitudes of God's children.

I have said that the death of Mrs. Longfellow, in the midst of his preparation abroad for his work at Harvard, was the turning-point in his career. From this time his literary activity is constructive and original. " Kavanagh " is an idyl, full of poetic material, but with so little of plot and with so much of sentiment, that novel-writing seems beyond our author's powers. Its motto, however, taken from Shakespeare, is significant:

" The flighty purpose never is o'ertook  
Unless the deed go with it."

This intimates that the writer is now bent on actual achievement. " Hyperion," though printed before " Kavanagh," is really his last work of importance in prose. Its motto is suggested by his recent affliction:

Look not mournfully into the Past. It comes not back  
again. Wisely improve the Present. It is thine. Go forth to

meet the shadowy Future, without fear, and with a manly heart.

These exercises in prose show industry and learning, together with the delicacy and skill of a literary artist, but they were only preparatory studies. Longfellow's real work was yet to come.

On his second European journey, the Rhine, Heidelberg, Switzerland, Paris, in succession, diverted him; but in 1836, after fifteen months of travel, he returned to Cambridge, where he taught for the next seventeen years, and where he lived until his death in 1882. With his residence in Cambridge began a new period in his history. He seems now to have discovered his vocation, and to have devoted to it all his powers. It was the vocation of the poet. Its public inauguration consisted in the printing of his first book of poems, "The Voices of the Night." It is doubtful whether any other work of a poetical sort has ever had so immediate recognition and success, or so great an influence in the shaping of future literary production, in America at least, as had this first venture of Longfellow. "A Psalm of Life" became the quickener of ten thousand youthful hearts, who thereafter repeated to themselves the poet's words of courage:

Lives of great men all remind us  
We can make our lives sublime,  
And, departing, leave behind us  
Footprints on the sands of time;

Footprints, that perhaps another,  
Sailing o'er life's solemn main,  
A forlorn and shipwrecked brother,  
Seeing, shall take heart again.

Let us, then, be up and doing,  
 With a heart for any fate;  
 Still achieving, still pursuing,  
 Learn to labor and to wait.

These poems are soothing as well as inspiring. Long labor has made them simple. They are faultless in point of taste. They appeal not only to the heroic, but also to the pathetic, elements of human nature. Some of them are the author's efforts to relieve his own deep depression, and they naturally minister comfort to others. They are not distinctly Christian poems, but they are by-products of Christianity, and we cannot imagine them as written in ante-Christian times. We may apply to them Longfellow's own words in "The Day is Done":

Such songs have power to quiet  
 The restless pulse of care,  
 And come like the benediction  
 That follows after prayer.

Then read from the treasured volume  
 The poem of thy choice,  
 And lend to the rhyme of the poet  
 The beauty of thy voice.

And the night shall be filled with music,  
 And the cares, that infest the day,  
 Shall fold their tents, like the Arabs,  
 And as silently steal away.

From this time forward our poet's life was one of almost uninterrupted prosperity and of ever-increasing fame. His second marriage, to Frances Elizabeth Appleton, soon put him in possession of the Craigie

House, the noblest mansion in Cambridge, the former headquarters of General George Washington at the beginning of the Revolutionary war. Here he dispensed a liberal hospitality. He entertained, and was entertained. The social side of his nature was quickened, and he was inspired to literary production. He was ready for his task; and, though somewhat handicapped by his college duties, he managed to derive even from them new stimulus and inspiration. He came gradually to be recognized as our most representative American poet; and that, because he combined the broadest literary outlook with the deepest knowledge of the human heart. If we are asked to name the chief poet of America, we must answer that Longfellow is our poet most truly national; and this verdict is rendered not only by Americans, but by the literary world at large. This place in the world's esteem he won by right; because, with all his knowledge of foreign literatures and authors, he avoided the sentimentality of European romanticism, while at the same time he glorified the sweet and tender instincts of human nature. Culture had broadened his views of life, but he had learned that the sources of true poetry are not without, but within. We may almost say that the last stanza of the "Prelude," in this first published book of poetry, lays down the program of his future life:

"Look, then, into thine heart, and write!  
Yes, into Life's deep stream!  
All forms of sorrow and delight,  
All solemn Voices of the Night,  
That can soothe thee, or affright,—  
Be these henceforth thy theme!"

It is a long stride forward, but I must here take account of the second great sorrow of Longfellow's life. After eighteen years of happy wedlock, his beautiful and accomplished wife met with an agonizing death. She had been sealing up in separate packages the clippings of her children's hair, when a lighted match fell to the floor and set her dress on fire. Her husband came to her relief, and was himself severely burned. His help was vain; she died next day; he was left in a distress so deep, that for months he could not speak of it; the effect of it indeed never left him; it colored all his views of life. To one who exhorted him to "bear his cross," he replied, "Yes, but what if one be stretched upon it!" And to George William Curtis he made answer: "I can write no word. God's will be done! I am too utterly wretched and overwhelmed,—to the eyes of others, outwardly, calm; but inwardly, bleeding to death." In his journal, many days after, he added these lines of Tennyson:

"Sleep sweetly, tender heart, in peace;  
Sleep, holy spirit, blessed soul,  
While the stars burn, the moons increase,  
And the great ages onward roll."

"Known and unknown, human, divine;  
Sweet human hand and lips and eye;  
Dear heavenly friend that canst not die;  
Mine, mine, for ever, ever mine."

Like Bryant, Longfellow strove to console himself by translating one of the great poets, choosing Dante. The first sonnet prefixed to this work, which was completed in 1866, contains the suggestive words:



I enter here from day to day,  
And leave my burden at this minster gate.

It was a long time before he plucked up courage to write any verses of his own. Among the verses then written, there was found in a portfolio after his death, the poem entitled "The Cross of Snow"; and that poem is the best proof of his depth of feeling, and at the same time his inability, with all his gifts of expression, to put that feeling into words:

In the long, sleepless watches of the night,  
A gentle face—the face of one long dead—  
Looks at me from the wall, where round its head  
The night-lamp casts a halo of pale light.  
Here in this room she died; and soul more white  
Never through martyrdom of fire was led  
To its repose; nor can in books be read  
The legend of a life more benedict.  
There is a mountain in the distant West  
That, sun-defying, in its deep ravines  
Displays a cross of snow upon its side.  
Such is the cross I wear upon my breast  
These eighteen years, through all the changing  
scenes  
And seasons, changeless since the day she died.

The years that intervened between these two great sorrows, the years from 1843 to 1861, were our poet's most productive years. Providence had favored him with every advantage and facility. He had passed from adolescence to manhood; he had mastered the languages and literatures of Europe; he was the idol of a notable literary circle; Agassiz, Hawthorne, Hillard, Felton, Sumner, Prescott, were his friends; in fact, association with them was so close, that there was

talk of a "Mutual Admiration Society"; and, when his work was reviewed by one of its members, a critic wrote after its title, "Insured in The Mutual." But Longfellow was never led astray, either by criticism or by applause. He was an industrious and conscientious workman, and even the slightest of his poems bore marks of scrupulous care and artistic skill. A stanza of "The Village Blacksmith" well expresses the spirit of his work:

Toiling,—rejoicing,—sorrowing,  
Onward through life he goes;  
Each morning sees some task begin,  
Each evening sees it close;  
Something attempted, something done,  
Has earned a night's repose.

During this comparatively youthful period, Longfellow gave to the world the best fruits of his brain and heart. No products of his later years, for purely poetic merit, surpass "Excelsior," "The Belfry of Bruges," "The Rainy Day," and "Mezzo Cammin." This last sonnet, written at Boppard on the Rhine in 1842, just before leaving for home, so nobly expresses the spirit of his life, that I cannot refrain from quoting it:

Half of my life is gone, and I have let  
The years slip from me and have not fulfilled  
The aspiration of my youth, to build  
Some tower of song with lofty parapet.  
Not indolence, nor pleasure, nor the fret  
Of restless passions that would not be stilled,  
But sorrow, and a care that almost killed,  
Kept me from what I may accomplish yet;  
Though, half-way up the hill, I see the Past

Lying beneath me with its sounds and sights,—  
 A city in the twilight dim and vast,  
 With smoking roofs, soft bells, and gleaming  
 lights,—  
 And hear above me on the autumnal blast  
 The cataract of Death far thundering from the  
 heights.

Here is true poetry, and with it a modesty equal to that of the youthful Milton. Was this lofty ambition ever realized? With all our admiration for Longfellow's gifts, we must hold that he was most successful in his shorter poems, and that he lacked the genius to construct an epic. His technical skill increased with years, but his creative power waned. Nor was he a dramatic poet. I do not now have in mind "The Spanish Student," which is a comparatively juvenile production, with romantic reminiscences of Byron and of Goethe, though it lacks the sentiment of the one and the fire of the other. I refer to such works as "Evangeline," "Hiawatha," "The Courtship of Miles Standish," and most of all, to what Longfellow intended to make the great and final work of his life, his poem entitled "Christus." Let me say a word of each of these in succession. "Evangeline" is an idealization of true love, with its patience and faithfulness. The Acadian maiden, separated from her lover on their marriage day, seeks him for years, only to find him at last an old man dying in a hospital:

Vainly he strove to whisper her name, for the accents  
 unuttered  
 Died on his lips, and their motion revealed what his tongue  
 would have spoken.  
 Vainly he strove to rise; and Evangeline, kneeling beside him,  
 Kissed his dying lips, and laid his head on her bosom.

Sweet was the light of his eyes; but it suddenly sank into  
darkness,  
As when a lamp is blown out by a gust of wind at a casement.

" Evangeline " is probably the most popular of our poet's works. It stirs deep founts of feeling, and the pathos of the story is undeniable. Hawthorne gave Longfellow the theme, but our poet worked it out in verse. The hexameter has never been better domesticated in English. Goethe's " Hermann and Dorothea " is its only poetical rival, and the work of Goethe is inferior in its direct appeal to the heart. The power of " Evangeline " is proved by an ever-increasing influx of pilgrims into Nova Scotia, and an ever-increasing interest in the haunts of Gabriel and Evangeline. Grand-Pré and the Basin of Minas are consecrated localities. Though the " forest primeval " has now disappeared, the traveler still imagines the scene as it was two centuries ago, and repeats to himself the words with which the poet begins his story :

This is the forest primeval. The murmuring pines and the  
hemlocks,  
Bearded with moss, and in garments green, indistinct in the  
twilight,  
Stand like Druids of eld, with voices sad and prophetic,  
Stand like harpers hoar, with beards that rest on their  
bosoms.

" The Song of Hiawatha," more than any other work of literature, more even than the novels of Cooper, preserves to us the spirit and the life of the American Indian. The Finnish poem of " Kalevala " suggested the meter, and Schoolcraft's " Algonic Researches " furnished most of the legends. There is a

religious element in the story, which shows the bent of Longfellow's mind in matters of theology, and which we must not fail to take account of. In his " Introduction," he makes appeal to the reader :

Ye whose hearts are fresh and simple,  
Who have faith in God and Nature,  
Who believe that in all ages  
Every human heart is human,  
That in even savage bosoms  
There are longings, yearnings, strivings  
For the good they comprehend not,  
That the feeble hands and helpless,  
Groping blindly in the darkness,  
Touch God's right hand in that darkness  
And are lifted up and strengthened;—  
Listen to this simple story,  
To this Song of Hiawatha!

The story of Hiawatha's Childhood, his Fasting, his Friends, his Sailing, his Fishing, his Wooing, his Wedding-feast, of the Ghosts, the Famine, the White Man's Foot, and of Hiawatha's Departure, is an idealized picture of Indian life and Indian religion. The poet has contradicted the dreadful doctrine that the only good Indian is a dead Indian, and has taught us anew that " in every nation he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is acceptable unto him " :

Thus departed Hiawatha,  
Hiawatha the Beloved,  
In the glory of the sunset,  
In the purple mists of evening,  
To the regions of the home-wind,  
Of the Northwest-Wind, Keewaydin,  
To the Islands of the Blessed,  
To the Kingdom of Ponemah,  
To the Land of the Hereafter.

"The Courtship of Miles Standish" is a kind of Puritan pastoral, the scene of which is laid, as the poem relates, "In the Old Colony days, in Plymouth, the land of the Pilgrims." John Alden undertakes to win the heart of Priscilla for Miles Standish, although John himself loves her, and only out of loyalty to his friend has undertaken to speak for another:

But as he warmed and glowed, in his simple and eloquent  
language,  
Quite forgetful of self, and full of the praise of his rival,  
Archly the maiden smiled, and, with eyes overrunning with  
laughter,  
Said, in a tremulous voice, "Why don't you speak for yourself,  
John?"

And so, all unexpectedly, John Alden wins his bride, and takes her to his home. The hard life of the Pilgrims is seen to have had its sunshine as well as its shadows:

Like a picture it seemed of the primitive, pastoral ages,  
Fresh with the youth of the world, and recalling Rebecca and  
Isaac,  
Old and yet ever new, and simple and beautiful always,  
Love immortal and young in the endless succession of lovers.  
So through the Plymouth woods passed onward the bridal  
procession.

All these longer poems fail to reach the highest mark, by reason of their very profuseness and facility. There is in them too much of merely superficial outflow. They lack intensity and condensation. This is particularly true in that poem which Longfellow wished to be his greatest—the poem entitled "Christus." It was to be an idealized history of Christianity,

in apostolic, medieval, and modern times, and was to illustrate successively the virtues of faith, hope, and charity. The apostolic portion of the work is called "The Divine Tragedy." This is little more than a somewhat commonplace versification of the story of the Gospels. The second part is entitled "The Golden Legend." It aims to show that, through the darkness of the Middle Ages, there ran a stream of faith, which preserved the apostolic tradition. The third part is called "The New England Tragedies," and this presents to us Puritans and Quakers, as still aiming to subdue the world, and to bring in the kingdom of God. The conception is noble, and the execution is often interesting. Yet we must confess that our attention sometimes flags. No paraphrase, whether metrical or prosaic, can improve upon the simple narrative of the Gospels. "The Golden Legend" is an imitation, possibly unconscious, of the second part of Goethe's "Faust," with its symbolic and supernatural paraphernalia—a diffuse and dreary application of the Christian "Legend" to actual life. "The New England Tragedies" come nearest to reality, and seem the only permanently valuable part of the lengthy poem.

The fundamental defect in this trilogy is its insufficient estimate of Jesus Christ. He is the gentle and sympathizing friend, the model of virtue, the worker of wonders, yes, even the man of sorrows; but he is not what the New Testament represents him to be—Immanuel, God with us, in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. His preexistence, incarnation, atonement, and omnipresence with his people, are ignored. One might read "Christus"

from beginning to end, and never learn that it is he through whom alone God is revealed; and that only he is the medium through whom God creates, upholds, and redeems. The result is that Christianity is only a "Golden Legend," and there is no personal and present Christ in Christian history. A mythological atmosphere envelops the whole story, and it seems only a poet's dream. The fortitude and faith of Puritan and Quaker have no sufficient justification. Our poet's plan is too large for his material. His "Christus" is indeed a "Mystery"; for it gives no real explanation of Christianity, or of its permanence and progress in the world. Michelangelo had more insight into the secret, when he painted on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel that majestic figure of the Creator in human form, and filled the whole end of that same chapel with the picture of Christ's Final Judgment. And Jonathan Edwards had greater insight still, when he planned a "History of Redemption," which began with eternity past, and concluded with eternity to come, but in which Christ was the only Revealer of God, the only Lord and King.

Longfellow had neither the genius, nor the faith, of Michelangelo or of Jonathan Edwards. His insufficient estimate of Jesus Christ was the logical consequence of his ignorance of the holiness of God, and of the deep damnation of human sin. Sin to him is a misfortune and a disease, but never guilt and ruin. The green apple needs only sunshine and rain to ripen it, for there is no worm at the heart. There needs no divine Saviour to redeem, no suffering of the Son of God to reveal the heart of the Father or to win the hearts of



men. The accusations of conscience and the fearful looking for of judgment are illusions of the unenlightened mind. Little sin means a belittled Christ; and of this belittled Christ Longfellow is the apostle.

Let us remember that the apostles of old were once in Longfellow's state of mind, and even in that state of mind did some preaching of the gospel. They were sent out on a trial-mission, before the resurrection and before Pentecost. They were Christians of an infantile sort, and they had learned some lessons in Christ's kindergarten. In spite of its defects, their message was good news, and it brought comfort to many hearts. So we are thankful for the elements of truth in the poetry of Longfellow, and we doubt not that his poetry has blessed the world. How much greater would have been its power, if he had grasped the truth that Christ is God manifest in the flesh, the atoning and omnipresent Saviour, the guiding force in human history, the arbiter of human destinies, before whom every knee in heaven and earth shall bow!

We betake ourselves to Longfellow's shorter poems for a more detailed account of his theology. His "Hymn for My Brother's Ordination" seems, at first sight, to be an expression of the common Christian faith:

Christ to the young man said: "Yet one thing more  
If thou wouldst perfect be,  
Sell all thou hast and give it to the poor,  
And come and follow me!"

Within this temple Christ again, unseen,  
Those sacred words hath said  
And his invisible hands to-day have been  
Laid on a young man's head.

And evermore beside him on his way  
 The unseen Christ shall move,  
 That he may lean upon his arm and say,  
 "Dost thou, dear Lord, approve?"

Beside him at the marriage feast shall be,  
 To make the scene more fair;  
 Beside him in the dark Gethsemane  
 Of pain and midnight prayer.

O holy trust! O endless sense of rest!  
 Like the beloved John  
 To lay his head upon the Saviour's breast,  
 And thus to journey on!

This is not a prayer to Christ, nor an assurance of his personal presence. It is rather an imaginative concession to traditional Christian feeling. Longfellow was no critic and no skeptic. He had no sympathy with agnosticism. His bent was rather toward the mystical element in Christianity. But the lack of an inward experience of the power of sin made all his religious conceptions ideal and poetical, rather than definite and practical. Whatever was sweet and beautiful pleased him, but he took no particular care to investigate its scientific value. He could appropriate, for purposes of poetry, much of the gospel idea of union with Christ, although he would have been unwilling to grant that this Christ is anything more than are other dear friends who have been long departed, but who, as we love to think, are still invisibly ministering to our good. He was as far from the true Christian mysticism as he was from sheer agnosticism. We may well compare his "Hymn for my Brother's Ordination" with the opening lines of Tennyson's "In

Memoriam," in which are asserted so strongly a faith in Christ's Creatorship and Lordship in the Universe, his possession of the Truth of which human philosophies are only fitful gleams, and his rightful claim to the absolute submission of every human will:

" Strong Son of God, immortal Love,  
Whom we, that have not seen thy face,  
By faith, and faith alone, embrace,  
Believing where we cannot prove;

" Thine are these orbs of light and shade;  
Thou madest Life in man and brute;  
Thou madest Death; and lo, thy foot  
Is on the skull which thou hast made.

. . . . .

" Thou seemest human and divine,  
The highest, holiest manhood, thou.  
Our wills are ours, we know not how;  
Our wills are ours, to make them thine.

" Our little systems have their day;  
They have their day and cease to be;  
They are but broken lights of thee,  
And thou, O Lord, art more than they."

Longfellow could never have subscribed to this utterance, and still less could he have taken upon his lips the sublime confession of the apostle Paul: "It is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself up for me." Paul believed in Christ's deity and atonement, as Longfellow did not.

Indeed, we mark a growing tendency toward a pagan view of the world and of religious things, as the years

go on. German influences were strong, and to some extent Goethe was the poet's model. Unevangelical theology, in cutting loose from Christ's control, tends ever to a liberalism which denies special revelation, and regards Christianity as only one of many natural religions, no one of which has proper claim to inspiration or supremacy. The classical mythology becomes even more satisfying, to this abnormal taste, than are the definite and authoritative demands of a historic revelation. "The Masque of Pandora" is the heathen version of the Fall of Man. When Pandora is tempted to open the box in which are imprisoned all the future ills of humanity, she speaks to her own heart:

No one sees me,  
Save the all-seeing Gods, who, knowing good  
And knowing evil, have created me  
Such as I am, and filled me with desire  
Of knowing good and evil like themselves.  
I hesitate no longer. Weal or woe,  
Or life or death, the moment shall decide.

She lifts the lid, and the evil is done:

Fever of the heart and brain,  
Sorrow, pestilence, and pain,  
Moans of anguish, maniac laughter,  
All the evils that hereafter  
Shall afflict and vex mankind,  
All into the air have risen  
From the chambers of their prison;  
Only Hope remains behind.

Now Pandora is a prey to anguish and to fear. Conscience witnesses against her, and the Eumenides, the Furies, threaten. Pandora resigns herself to their chastisement:

Me let them punish.  
Only through punishment of our evil deeds,  
Only through suffering, are we reconciled  
To the immortal Gods and to ourselves.

But the Eumenides reply :

Never by lapse of time  
The soul defaced by crime  
Into its former self returns again;  
For every guilty deed  
Holds in itself the seed  
Of retribution and undying pain.

Evangelical theology does not grant that God created men such as they now are, or that he "filled them with desire of knowing good and evil like himself." It holds that this longing for that which is forbidden is the consequence and the penalty of man's free choice to disobey, instead of letting God's will rule within him. And evangelical theology does not grant that suffering the punishment of his evil deeds of itself reconciles man either to God or to himself. There must be also God's own suffering on man's account, and the renewing of man's spirit by the Spirit of God. If by "Helios," in this poem, is meant "the Sun of Righteousness," Jesus Christ, we may subscribe to its last stanza, and give it a Christian interpretation :

Never shall be the loss  
Restored, till Helios  
Hath purified them with his heavenly fires;  
Then what was lost is won,  
And the new life begun,  
Kindled with nobler passions and desires.

"Hermes Trismegistus" seems to be a confession that the poet despaired of any solution of the mysteries of existence, and that his final attitude was that of the

agnostic. Only Christ holds in his girdle the key to those mysteries, and to call him only a human being like ourselves is to leave ourselves in mental and moral darkness. This poem of "Hermes Trismegistus" is one of the last which our poet wrote, and it shows that he needed greater light. His "Hermes" is apparently identical with himself:

By the Nile I see him wandering,  
 Pausing now and then,  
 On the mystic union pondering  
 Between gods and men;  
 Half believing, wholly feeling,  
 With supreme delight,  
 How the gods, themselves concealing,  
 Lift men to their height.

. . . . .  
 Who shall call his dreams fallacious?  
 Who has searched or sought  
 All the unexplored and spacious  
 Universe of thought?  
 Who, in his own skill confiding,  
 Shall with rule and line  
 Mark the border-land dividing  
 Human and divine?

. . . . .  
 Thine, O priest of Egypt, lately  
 Found I in the vast,  
 Weed-encumbered, sombre, stately,  
 Grave-yard of the Past;  
 And a presence moved before me  
 On that gloomy shore,  
 As a waft of wind, that o'er me  
 Breathed, and was no more.

Longfellow's faith was simply a faith in the historic value of Christ's human example. This is a minor point in Christian doctrine, yet it is an essential

point, and such faith as this, though fragmentary, may have great influence over life and conduct. I see the influence of it in our poet's own life, and in his writing. Without this faith, I doubt whether his " Poems on Slavery " could ever have been written. They came short of the fire and fury which abolitionists like Garrison demanded. But they appealed to the Christian conscience on behalf of the oppressed, and their very calmness and sympathy moved many who, like Sumner, could not be revolutionists. It is almost amusing to remember that Whittier urged Longfellow to be a candidate for Congress, as he himself once proposed to be. The poet declined, with the words: " Partisan warfare becomes too violent, too vindictive, for my taste." He could praise Channing's denunciations of slavery, and his prophecies of its downfall, and could entreat him to

Go on, until this land revokes  
The old and chartered Lie,  
The feudal curse, whose whips and yokes  
Insult humanity. •

But he himself could better serve the cause by such pathetic verses as those in which he describes the selling to a slave-dealer, by her own father, of " The Quadroon Girl ":

His heart within him was at strife  
With such accursèd gains:  
For he knew whose passions gave her life,  
Whose blood ran in her veins.

But the voice of nature was too weak;  
He took the glittering gold!  
Then pale as death grew the maiden's cheek,  
Her hands as icy cold.

The Slaver led her from the door,  
He led her by the hand,  
To be his slave and paramour  
In a strange and distant land.

If Whittier was our poet of Liberty, Longfellow was our poet of Union. In the days that were to come, it was quite as important that national solidarity should be preserved, as that freedom should be given to the slave. No utterance in our literature has had more lasting influence than Longfellow's poem, "The Building of the Ship." The closing stanza of it is one of his noblest :

Thou, too, sail on, O Ship of State!  
Sail on, O UNION, strong and great!  
Humanity with all its fears,  
With all the hopes of future years,  
Is hanging breathless on thy fate!  
We know what Master laid thy keel,  
What Workmen wrought thy ribs of steel,  
Who made each mast, and sail, and rope,  
What anvils rang, what hammers beat,  
In what a forge and what a heat  
Were shaped the anchors of thy hope!  
Fear not each sudden sound and shock,  
'Tis of the wave and not the rock;  
'Tis but the flapping of the sail,  
And not a rent made by the gale!  
In spite of rock and tempest's roar,  
In spite of false lights on the shore,  
Sail on, nor fear to breast the sea!  
Our hearts, our hopes, are all with thee,  
Our hearts, our hopes, our prayers, our tears,  
Our faith triumphant o'er our fears,  
Are all with thee,—are all with thee!

And to this chant in praise of Union must be added his prophecy of universal Peace. "The Arsenal at



Springfield " has ever since been quoted by those who are " warlike against war ":

Down the dark future, through long generations,  
The echoing sounds grow fainter and then cease;  
And like a bell, with solemn, sweet vibrations,  
I hear once more the voice of Christ say, " Peace! "

Peace! and no longer from its brazen portals  
The blast of War's great organ shakes the skies!  
But beautiful as songs of the immortals,  
The holy melodies of love arise.

The peace which Longfellow desired was not simply peace within our own borders. It was world-wide and universal peace. He was not, and he did not desire to be, a merely national poet. In " Kavanagh " he said:

Nationality is a good thing to a certain extent, but universality is better. All that is best in the great poets of all countries is not what is national in them, but what is universal. Their roots are in their native soil; but their branches wave in unpatriotic air, that speaks the same language to all men, and their leaves shine with the illimitable light that pervades all lands.

In this somewhat florid and rather obscure utterance of his youth, Longfellow wisely held that the true poet appeals to the universal instincts of humanity. He brings men back to nature. But can Art redeem? There are poems in which our poet seems to intimate this, and so, to magnify his office. " Kéramos " gives us his conception of Art:

Art is the child of Nature; yes,  
Her darling child, in whom we trace  
The features of the mother's face,

Her aspect and her attitude;  
 All her majestic loveliness  
 Chastened and softened and subdued  
 Into a more attractive grace,  
 And with a human sense imbued.

He is the greatest artist, then,  
 Whether of pencil or of pen,  
 Who follows Nature. Never man,  
 As artist or as artisan,  
 Pursuing his own fantasies,  
 Can touch the human heart, or please,  
 Or satisfy our nobler needs,  
 As he who sets his willing feet  
 In Nature's footprints, light and fleet,  
 And follows fearless where she leads.

To this we reply that our true nature can be understood and interpreted only when we recognize our sin, and accept God's remedy for sin in Christ. The lack of this fundamental knowledge makes Longfellow's poetry comparatively weak and superficial. He deals with results, but not with causes. His Christianity has no Cross of divine sacrifice, and so furnishes no refuge for the guilty, and no dynamic for the saved. He has not grappled with the deepest problems, and he cannot stir the deepest emotions. Creative power in the poet is inseparable from religious experience; Longfellow's genius therefore is representative rather than creative; he cannot be ranked with the great poets of all time; he must be counted only the chief sweet singer of America.

The poem entitled "Michael Angelo" is interesting, in this connection, and that for two reasons. It is a posthumous work, found in the author's desk after his decease, and it is almost autobiographical. It cer-

tainly gives us his latest views with regard to the philosophy of art in general, and by inference, the philosophy of poetry in particular. There are intimations in it that our poet realized the nearness of his end, and was eager to improve every passing hour. We can hear him speaking, in the words he puts into the mouth of the great painter, sculptor, and architect, as he meditates upon the glories of old Rome:

Malaria?

Yes, malaria of the mind,  
Out of this tomb of the majestic Past;  
The fever to accomplish some great work  
That will not let us sleep. I must go on  
Until I die.

. . . . .

How will men speak of me when I am gone,  
When all this colorless, sad life is ended,  
And I am dust? They will remember only  
The wrinkled forehead, the marred countenance,  
The rudeness of my speech, and my rough manners,  
And never dream that underneath them all  
There was a woman's heart of tenderness;  
They will not know the secret of my life,  
Locked up in silence, or but vaguely hinted  
In uncouth rhymes, that may perchance survive  
Some little space in memories of men!  
Each one performs his life-work, and then leaves it;  
Those that come after him will estimate  
His influence on the age in which he lived.

. . . . .

Not events

Exasperate me, but the funest conclusions  
I draw from these events; the sure decline  
Of art, and all the meaning of that word;  
All that embellishes and sweetens life,  
And lifts it from the level of low cares  
Into the purer atmosphere of beauty.

In the "Dedication" to this poem, I find one of the best statements of Longfellow's conception of his own work. He was rebuilding the ruins of a noble past, and reviving for his own generation the beauty and the pathos that had stirred the hearts of men in olden time. This particular sonnet has a literary charm which ranks our poet among the most finished workmen of the world, and for that reason also I take pleasure in quoting it at length:

Nothing that is shall perish utterly,  
But perish only to revive again  
In other forms, as clouds restore in rain  
The exhalations of the land and sea.  
Men build their houses from the masonry  
Of ruined tombs; the passion and the pain  
Of hearts, that long have ceased to beat, remain  
To throb in hearts that are, or are to be.  
So from old chronicles, where sleep in dust  
Names that once filled the world with trumpet tones,  
I build this verse; and flowers of song have thrust  
Their roots among the loose disjointed stones,  
Which to this end I fashion as I must.  
Quickened are they that touch the Prophet's bones.

"The faith in the Ideal," of which Longfellow speaks in this poem, was the faith that led him on. The words of his "Michael Angelo," modest as they are, seem to express his own modest feeling, as he looked back to his working days:

Pleasantly  
Come back to me the days when, as a youth,  
I walked with Ghirlandajo in the gardens  
Of Medici, and saw the antique statues,  
The forms august of gods and godlike men,  
And the great world of art revealed itself

To my young eyes. Then all that man hath done  
Seemed possible to me. Alas! how little  
Of all I dreamed of has my hand achieved!

In many ways, "Michael Angelo" is the most mature work of the poet, although it lacks the spontaneity and simplicity of his youth. In learning and in thought, he was never so well equipped as when he wrote this poem. After eighteen years of service in his chair at Harvard, he had resigned his professorship, and had devoted himself exclusively to poetry. Europe as well as America had come to recognize Tennyson and himself as the two greatest poets of the nineteenth century. England and the United States were united by a new tie, when Longfellow's name became a household word in both countries. He achieved this fame and influence by being, not provincial in his sympathies, but universal. I find the proof of this in his generous estimate of the works of others, and specially in the noble tribute which he renders to Tennyson, his only rival in the suffrages of the English-speaking world:

Poet! I come to touch thy lance with mine;  
Not as a knight, who on the listed field  
Of tourney touched his adversary's shield  
In token of defiance, but in sign  
Of homage to the mastery, which is thine,  
In English song; nor will I keep concealed  
And voiceless as a rivulet frost-congealed,  
My admiration for thy verse divine.  
Not of the howling dervishes of song,  
Who craze the brain with their delirious dance,  
Art thou, O sweet historian of the heart!  
Therefore to thee the laurel-leaves belong,  
To thee our love and our allegiance,  
For thy allegiance to the poet's art.

Longfellow's kindly spirit was shown in his reception of criticism. There was much to try a vain or rancorous soul. "Hiawatha" was easily parodied, and its hero was dubbed "Milgenwatha." Twice our poet was accused of plagiarism; once for having stolen the tale of "Martin Franc, or the Monk of St. Anthony," from George Colman's "Knight and Friar"; and again by Edgar Allan Poe, for having passed off a ballad of Motherwell, "The Bonnie George Campbell," as his own translation from the German. Our author replied to the first accusation that he had, without knowledge of Colman's work, simply used the same material that Colman himself had used. To the second accusation, accompanied by Poe's declaration that "Longfellow *will* steal, though perhaps he cannot help it," he replied that he had found the ballad in a German collection, with no indication of its being a translation, and that he had simply put it into English, without claiming authorship. Poe was informed of his error, but he never made reparation.

I am specially interested in our poet's relations with Emerson. The two were never intimate, though they were never on unfriendly terms. Longfellow could not sympathize with Emerson's transcendentalism, or with the disjointedness of his thinking. He speaks of Emerson's "Essays," as "full of prose poetry, magnificent absurdities, and simple truths." "But it is impossible," he adds, "to see any connection in the ideas." In his diary he writes:

Hear Emerson's lecture on Holiness, which he defines to be "the breath of the Soul of the world." This lecture is a great bugbear to many pious, feeble souls. Not exactly

comprehending it (and who does?) they seem to be sitting in the shadow of some awful atheism or other. . . This evening Emerson lectured on the "Affections"; a good lecture. He mistakes his power somewhat, and at times speaks in oracles, darkly. He is vastly more of a poet than a philosopher.

Received from Emerson a copy of his Poems. F. read it to me all the evening and until late at night. It gave us the keenest pleasure; though many of the pieces present themselves Sphinxlike, and, "struggling to get free their hinder-parts," offer a very bold front and challenge your answer. Throughout the volume, through the golden mist and sublimation of fancy, gleam bright veins of purest poetry, like rivers running through meadows. Truly a rare volume; with many exquisite poems in it, among which I should cull out "Monadnock," "Threnody," "The Humble-Bee," as containing much of the quintessence of poetry.

Longfellow was a man of deep feeling, but he did not wear his heart on his sleeve. Affectionate and gentle in his nature, he could not be demonstrative about the things that touched him most. One of the most pathetic experiences of his life was the loss of his little daughter Fanny. He had comforted himself with the hymn:

Give to the winds thy fears;  
Hope, and be undismayed;  
God hears thy sighs and counts thy tears;  
God shall lift up thy head.

But after a day of agony, in which the child lay motionless, with only a little moan now and then,

At half past four this afternoon she died. F. and M. sat with me by her bedside. Her breathing grew fainter, fainter, then ceased without a sigh, without a flutter,—perfectly quiet, perfectly painless. The sweetest expression was on her face.

The room was full of angels where she lay;  
And when they had departed she was gone.

And a full month after, he writes in his diary:

I feel very sad to-day. I miss very much my dear little Fanny. An inappeasable longing to see her comes over me at times, which I can hardly control.

It is not to be expected that we should find, either in his prose or in his poetry, any very definite statements of his theological or religious beliefs. He was no dogmatist—he rather doubted the possibility of expressing the mysterious relations of the finite spirit with the infinite Spirit from whom it came, and in whom it lives. If he had had a more pronounced belief in the inspiration of the Scriptures, or had had a more profound Christian experience, he could have left to us more material from which to construct his theological system. Both Bryant and Whittier have given us many hymns for our Christian worship. Longfellow is not so prolific. But who can fail to recognize the Christian spirit of his early poem, "Blind Bartimeus"?

Blind Bartimeus at the gates  
Of Jericho in darkness waits;  
He hears the crowd;—he hears a breath  
Say, "It is Christ of Nazareth!"  
And calls, in tones of agony,  
*Ἰησοῦ, ἐλέησόν με !*

The thronging multitudes increase;  
Blind Bartimeus, hold thy peace!  
But still, above the noisy croud,  
The beggar's cry is shrill and loud;  
Until they say, "He calleth thee!"  
*θάρσει; ἔγχειται, ψωνεῖ σε !*



Then saith the Christ, as silent stands  
 The crowd, "What wilt thou at my hands?"  
 And he replies, "Oh, give me light!  
 Rabbi, restore the blind man's sight!"  
 And Jesus answers, "Υπαγε·  
*Ἡ πίστις σου σέσωξέ σε!*

Ye that have eyes, yet cannot see,  
 In darkness and in misery,  
 Recall those mighty Voices Three,  
*Ἰησοῦ, ἐλέησόν με!*  
*θάρσει, ἔγειραι, ὕπαγε!*  
*Ἡ πίστις σου σέσωξέ σε!*

I know of no poet who has written so little that is professedly Christian, and whose poetry is notwithstanding so shot through and through with the Christian spirit. It seems as if the same Saviour who had cleansed him had also bidden him, "See that thou tell no man!" He had undoubtedly a prejudice against a forthputting and demonstrative evangelicism. But the atmosphere of his poems is the atmosphere of gospel truth. There is a tenderness and compassion not to be found in pagan or agnostic literature. The last stanza of "Christus" best expresses the innermost thought of the poet:

From all vain pomps and shows,  
 From the pride that overflows,  
 And the false conceits of men;  
 From all the narrow rules  
 And subtleties of Schools,  
 And the craft of tongue and pen;  
 Bewildered in its search,  
 Bewildered with the cry:  
 Lo, here! lo, there, the Church!  
 Poor, sad Humanity  
 Through all the dust and heat

Turns back with bleeding feet,  
 By the weary road it came,  
 Unto the simple thought  
 By the great Master taught,  
 And that remaineth still:  
 Not he that repeateth the name,  
 But he that doeth the will!

I am persuaded that in the First Interlude of "Christus," our poet is in like manner expressing his own religious convictions:

My work is finished; I am strong  
 In faith, and hope, and charity;  
 For I have written the things I see,  
 The things that have been and shall be,  
 Conscious of right, nor fearing wrong;  
 Because I am in love with Love,  
 And the sole thing I hate is Hate;  
 For Hate is death; and Love is life,  
 A peace, a splendor from above;  
 And Hate, a never-ending strife,  
 A smoke, a blackness from the abyss  
 Where unclean serpents coil and hiss!  
 Love is the Holy Ghost within;  
 Hate the unpardonable sin!  
 Who preaches otherwise than this,  
 Betrays his Master with a kiss!

This is not Epicureanism or Stoicism, but faith in an overruling divine Providence, and in the Christ who has manifested God to men. On a visit to his old home in Portland, he wrote, in his diary, of the silvery reflection of the moonlight on the sea:

Among other thoughts we had this cheering one, that the whole sea was flashing with this heavenly light, though we saw it only in a single track; the dark waves are the dark providences of God; luminous, though not to us; and even to ourselves in another position.

I am therefore not willing to take the closing words of "Michael Angelo" as the final expression of the poet's feeling in view of his approaching end. "Michael Angelo" is called, in its very title, "A Fragment"; and it was unfinished at the poet's death. It certainly gives us a dark picture of unfulfilled ambition:

Life hath become to me  
An empty theater,—its lights extinguished,  
The music silent, and the actors gone;  
And I alone sit musing on the scenes  
That once have been. I am so old that Death  
Oft plucks me by the cloak, to come with him;  
And some day, like this lamp, shall I fall down,  
And my last spark of life will be extinguished.  
Ah me! ah me! what darkness of despair!  
So near to death, and yet so far from God!

"Morituri Salutamus" is a notable poem, both for its occasion and for its expression of Longfellow's thoughts in view of death. Its title is the words of the Roman gladiators, as they came to their final fight in the arena. It was written for the fiftieth anniversary of his college class, and it was actually delivered before them:

"O Cæsar, we who are about to die  
Salute you!" was the gladiators' cry  
In the arena, standing face to face  
With death and with the Roman populace.

. . . . .

Young men, whose generous hearts are beating high,  
We who are old, and are about to die,  
Salute you; hail you; take your hands in ours,  
And crown you with our welcome as with flowers.

. . . . .

What then? Shall we sit idly down and say  
 The night hath come; it is no longer day?  
 The night hath not yet come; we are not quite  
 Cut off from labor by the failing light;  
 Something remains for us to do or dare;  
 Even the oldest tree some fruit may bear;  
 Not Ædipus Coloneus, or Greek Ode,  
 Or tales of pilgrims that one morning rode  
 Out of the gateway of the Tabard Inn,  
 But other something, would we but begin;  
 For age is opportunity no less  
 Than youth itself, though in another dress,  
 And as the evening twilight fades away  
 The sky is filled with stars, invisible by day.

When he revisited Brunswick in the summer of 1875, he wrote a sonnet as he viewed the funeral-stone that marked the resting-place of Parker Cleaveland, one of the best of his early friends. The closing lines of that sonnet declare Longfellow's firm belief in immortality:

With fond affection memory loves to dwell  
 On the old days, when his example made  
 A pastime of the toil of tongue and pen;  
 And now, amid the groves he loved so well  
 That naught could lure him from their grateful  
 shade,  
 He sleeps, but wakes elsewhere, for God hath  
 said, Amen!

And yet I turn to Longfellow's earliest poems for my clearest proofs that he believed in another life beyond the grave. In his later years he grew more thoughtful, but also more reticent, with regard to the great problems of existence. The day for easygoing faith had passed. Controversy had raged around him. He had little interest in theological discussion—it seemed to him of less importance to define what is be-

yond us, than to practise what we already know. But he would have been more or less than human, if he had been unaffected by the strife. It made him less and less inclined to dogmatic utterance, or to express the deepest feelings of his soul. The poems of his early days, however, were never withdrawn or disavowed; and they remain to us as spontaneous and genuine expressions of religious feeling though they are entirely free from hackneyed phraseology and from sentimental exaggeration. In “The Beleaguered City” he wrote:

I have read, in the marvellous heart of man,  
That strange and mystic scroll,  
That an army of phantoms vast and wan  
Beleaguer the human soul.

. . . . .

And, when the solemn and deep church-bell  
Entreats the soul to pray,  
The midnight phantoms feel the spell,  
The shadows sweep away.

Down the broad Vale of Tears afar  
The spectral camp is fled;  
Faith shineth as a morning star,  
Our ghastly fears are dead.

If we seek evidence of our poet's belief in an immortal life beyond the grave, we may find it in that “Psalm of Life” which, more than any other of Longfellow's poems, drew to him first of all the admiration and affection of his youthful contemporaries:

Tell me not, in mournful numbers,  
Life is but an empty dream!—  
For the soul is dead that slumbers,  
And things are not what they seem.

Life is real! Life is earnest!  
And the grave is not its goal;  
Dust thou art, to dust returnest,  
Was not spoken of the soul.

In "The Reaper and the Flowers," he comforts the mother who has lost her child :

There is a Reaper, whose name is Death,  
And, with his sickle keen,  
He reaps the bearded grain at a breath,  
And the flowers that grow between.

. . . . .  
"My Lord, has need of these flowerets gay,"  
The Reaper said, and smiled;  
"Dear tokens of the earth are they,  
Where He was once a child."

. . . . .  
And the mother gave, in tears and pain,  
The flowers she most did love;  
She knew she should find them all again  
In the fields of light above.

"The Light of Stars" witnesses that even in the midst of earthly losses and trials the soul may be hopeful and quiet :

The star of the unconquered will,  
He rises in my breast,  
Serene, and resolute, and still,  
And calm, and self-possessed.

And thou, too, whosoe'er thou art,  
That readest this brief psalm,  
As one by one thy hopes depart,  
Be resolute and calm.

Oh, fear not in a world like this,  
And thou shalt know ere long,  
Know how sublime a thing it is  
To suffer and be strong.

"Flowers" teach lessons of symbolic lore to those who can read them:

Spake full well, in language quaint and olden,  
One who dwelleth by the castled Rhine,  
When he called the flowers, so blue and golden,  
Stars, that in earth's firmament do shine.

. . . . .

Wondrous truths, and manifold as wondrous,  
God hath written in those stars above;  
But not less in the bright flowerets under us  
Stands the revelation of his love.

. . . . .

And the Poet, faithful and far-seeing,  
Sees, alike in stars and flowers, a part  
Of the self-same, universal being,  
Which is throbbing in his brain and heart.

. . . . .

And with childlike, credulous affection,  
We behold their tender buds expand;  
Emblems of our own great resurrection,  
Emblems of the bright and better land.

Longfellow translated from other languages many poems which he would not have ventured to write in his own name. What shall we say of the verses in "Coplas de Manrique" which follow?

To One alone my thoughts arise,  
The Eternal Truth, the Good and Wise,  
To Him I cry,  
Who shared on earth our common lot,  
But the world comprehended not  
His deity.

. . . . .

Yes, the glad messenger of love,  
To guide us to our home above,

The Saviour came;  
 Born amid mortal cares and fears,  
 He suffered in this vale of tears  
 A death of shame.

. . . . .

"O thou, that for our sins didst take  
 A human form, and humbly make  
 Thy home on earth;  
 Thou, that to thy divinity  
 A human nature didst ally  
 By mortal birth,

"And in that form didst suffer here  
 Torment, and agony, and fear,  
 So patiently;  
 By thy redeeming grace alone,  
 And not for merits of my own,  
 Oh, pardon me!"

And what shall we say of such sweet and reposeful words as those in which our poet has translated, from the German of Salis-Seewis, his "Song of the Silent Land"?

Into the Silent Land!  
 Ah! who shall lead us thither?  
 Clouds in the evening sky more darkly gather,  
 And shattered wrecks lie thicker on the strand.  
 Who leads us with a gentle hand  
 Thither, oh, thither,  
 Into the Silent Land?

Into the Silent Land!  
 To you, ye boundless regions  
 Of all perfection! Tender morning-visions  
 Of beauteous souls! The Future's pledge and band!  
 Who in Life's battle firm doth stand,  
 Shall bear Hope's tender blossoms  
 Into the Silent Land.



O Land! O Land!  
For all the broken-hearted  
The mildest herald by our fate allotted,  
Beckons, and with inverted torch doth stand  
To lead us with a gentle hand  
To the land of the great Departed,  
Into the Silent Land.

These translations show a comprehensive appreciation of other faiths, even if they do not show the drift of the poet's own beliefs. His kindly and sympathetic nature entered into the feelings of others, and interpreted them as efforts to grasp and express the truth. "He that is not against us is for us," might have been his motto. He was a poet of humanity, but not of divinity. Humanity, to some extent, indeed, reveals divinity. Unfortunately, our present humanity is neither normal nor true. It is only a partial revelation of God. We need the perfect humanity of Christ to instruct us; and, without knowledge of our sin, we cannot fully appreciate him. Longfellow did see Christ, in some of his most winning attributes; and, because of this vision of a human ideal, he could interpret a people's heart, and could win their love. He would have been a greater poet, if he had apprehended Christ's divine nature, his revelation of God's righteousness, and his atonement for our sin. But he saw the beauty and the pathos of life. The gentle and tender elements in humanity he could appropriate and express. The background of divine holiness, which would have made life more solemn and significant, was beyond his ken.

Like Bryant, Longfellow found diversion and solace, after the death of his wife, in translating one of the great poets. But while Bryant took Homer, Long-

fellow dealt with Dante. It would at first sight appear incongruous that so sweet and mellow a poet should put into English the horrors of the "Inferno"; and we must confess that Rossetti has, in that part of "The Divine Comedy," achieved a greater triumph than has Longfellow. But it can be said for our poet, that the smoothness and melody of the *terza-rima* found in him a grateful response, and he loved the very softness with which Dante clothes his images of terror. It is also true that Longfellow looked beneath the surface, and perceived that even Dante had no thought of mere physical torment as constituting the essences of punishment, either in this world or in the next; the "Inferno" is only a vast allegory, which describes eternal pangs of conscience under the figure of literal fire. So our poet could see, even in eternal suffering, the discipline of eternal love. All this becomes more manifest in his versions of the "Purgatorio" and of the "Paradiso." Here Longfellow's style favors his subject, and critics have declared his work to be without a superior, in faithful rendering of both the substance and the form of the original. We can easily imagine the old man eloquent, cheering his days, as he drew near his end, with the spiritual and soul-subduing strains of Dante's "Purgatory" and "Paradise."

Our poet was sunny and genial to the last, though he was afflicted with rheumatism, and his days were never free from pain. When confined to his room, he delighted to receive and to entertain children. Charles Kingsley declared that his "face was the most beautiful he had ever seen." It was the noble expression

of a noble soul. When he died in 1882, at the age of seventy-five, America mourned his loss, as it had mourned the loss of no other of its literary sons. And the mourning was not confined to our own land. In the Poets' Corner of Westminster Abbey, the bust of only one American has a place. It is the bust of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. The benignant countenance looks down upon the tomb of Chaucer, and is midway between the memorials to Cowley and to Dryden. Its admission to that Valhalla is proof that Longfellow was recognized not simply as an American poet, but also as a poet of our whole English-speaking race. Another monument, less public but more affecting, is the tribute which James Russell Lowell wrote on Longfellow's sixtieth birthday, and which sums up most admirably the spirit of his life and work:

"I need not praise the sweetness of his song,  
Where limpid verse to limpid verse succeeds  
Smooth as our Charles, when, fearing lest he wrong  
The new moon's mirrored skiff, he glides along,  
Full without noise, and whispers in his reeds.

"With loving breath of all the winds his name  
Is blown about the world, but to his friends  
A sweeter secret hides behind his fame,  
And Love steals shyly through the loud acclaim  
To murmur a *God bless you!* and there ends."



**VI**

**JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL**

**T**



## JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL

JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL is our chief poetical moralist. Not our greatest poet; for, in simplicity and range of sentiment, Longfellow excels him. He is not a melodist, like Poe; nor a politician, like Whittier; nor a somber lover of nature, like Bryant. But ethics is bred in the very bone. From early manhood, abstract right fired his imagination, took the place of divinity as a study, became the real subject of all his poetry. In two respects, Lowell made his work an important contribution to human progress: On the one hand, he added wit and humor to the forces of reform; and, on the other hand, his breadth and sanity of judgment in politics and literature gave enduring value to his criticism. Yet he was hampered by the brilliancy of his genius. He was so fertile in ideas that images ran over one another in his brain and entangled his expression of them. Only in occasional snatches do we find pure poetry. But the sincerity of the man makes all his writing impressive. To him literature was a ministry; and he could always, without rebuke, apply to himself the poet's words:

"He serves the Muses erringly and ill,  
Whose aim is pleasure, light and fugitive."

Lowell was a typical man of letters; but, with all his wit and humor, he was a profoundly serious writer.

His ethics took the form of patriotism. There never was a more complete American. He put his literary gifts at the service of his country and of humanity. He gloried in our national greatness, while at the same time he recognized and labored to cure our national defects. His poetry greatly helped the cause of freedom and unity in the time of our Civil War. It is an interesting coincidence that he was born on the twenty-second of February, 1819, just eighty-seven years after the birth of George Washington. George William Curtis calls attention to this fact; and, as illustrations of patriotic service, he blends the names of Lowell and of Washington together.

The father of our poet was a clergyman of literary tastes, and of a benignant disposition. His mother had in her nature a tincture of romance. James was her youngest child, and her darling. Handsome and affectionate, he responded to her admiration of fields and flowers, and to her stories of heroism on land and sea. The father took the boy with him, in his long journeys in the one-horse chaise, whenever he made his frequent exchange of pulpits with ministers of the neighboring towns. Eastern Massachusetts had then an almost unmixed native population. Then and there could be heard the genuine Yankee dialect. Lowell declared in after years that, of all languages on the face of the earth, he was most certain that he knew the Yankee; and it is probable that these clerical inroads into the country gave to the susceptible and fun-loving child the inimitable vocabulary and grammar which "The Biglow Papers" afterward immortalized.

The bright boy was a lover of books; but he loved



regular study and discipline much less. It was well for him that William Wells, an Englishman, "of good breeding as well as good learning," taught him his Latin. Lowell never lost the benefit of that severe instruction. His favorite occupation, however, was his voluntary and miscellaneous foraging in fields of English literature. When he entered Harvard College at the age of fifteen, he was widely read. In his sophomore year he writes to a friend that Milton has excited his "ambition to read all the Greek and Latin classics which he"—that is, Milton himself—"did." The same letter shows that Lowell had more than ordinary acquaintance with the Satires of Horace, as well as the Bucolics of Vergil. Butler's "Hudibras," Beattie's "Minstrel," together with Akenside, Byron, Coleridge, Cowley, Pope, and Spenser, are casually mentioned as parts of his English acquisitions. The mathematics of the regular course, however, did not attract him. He was somewhat neglectful of college prayers. Popular with his classmates, he was not equally popular with the faculty. In fact, though chosen by his class as their poet, he was not permitted by the authorities to deliver his poem, or even to graduate. For several months he was suspended from all college exercises, and was required to absent himself from the neighborhood of the institution. Mr. Norton, however, relates that "in the autumn, having received his degree with his classmates, he returned to his home in Cambridge."

Reflection upon his waywardness, and upon the sorrow it caused to his parents, was apparently the turning-point in his career. He spent his days of "rustication" in Concord, where he met Emerson, of whom

he writes: "He is a good-natured man, in spite of his doctrines." Up to this time Lowell was neither a transcendentalist nor an abolitionist. The class-poem, which he wrote in Concord and distributed to his classmates in print after their graduation, speaks rather slightly of both these great movements of the time. But he was gradually and unconsciously changing. He accuses himself of indolence and of dreaming. He reads Blackstone, but soon renounces the law:

They tell me I must study law.  
 They say that I have dreamed, and dreamed too long;  
 That I must rouse, and seek for fame and gold;  
 That I must scorn this idle gift of song,  
     And mingle with the vain and proud and cold.  
     Is then this petty strife  
     The end and aim of life,  
 All that is worth the living for below?  
 O God, then call me hence, for I would gladly go!

Literature is his real idol. Yet increasing maturity gives to his thoughts an ethical bent. He aims to write a poem on Cromwell, whom he admires more than he admires the dashing Cavaliers. He becomes "ultra-democratic"; calls the Church of England an "incubus"; declares that the abolitionists are the only party with which he sympathizes. He thinks seriously of going into the divinity school, as a preparation for the ministry; but he gives this up, for the reason that he has not money enough to be independent, as a minister ought to be. He records a vow to read a chapter in the Bible every night. "Only fools," he says, "despise religion." But he cares little for outward religious observances:

What is religion? 'Tis to go  
 To church one day in seven,  
 And think that we, of all men, know  
 The only way to heaven.

But he that hath found, as the holy apostle did at Athens of the heathens, an altar to the unknown God in his heart, and who in a spirit of love and wonder offereth up acceptable offerings thereon in the Temple of Nature, doth not he, of the twain, walk with God?

This turmoil and uncertainty are signs of a vigorous mind, eager for action, and desirous of doing the best that is possible; but they also show that as yet Lowell is little acquainted with his own powers or with the needs of the world. Out of this seething caldron, however, there slowly rises the shape of a definite ambition—an ambition that masters him and compels his following through all his after-life:

Above all things should I love to be able to sit down and do something literary for the rest of my natural life. . . Before I die, your heart shall be gladdened by seeing your wayward, vain, and too often selfish friend do something that shall make his name honored. As Sheridan once said, "It's in me, and" (we'll skip the oath) "it shall come out!" I shall let my fate be governed by circumstance and influence. . . A man should regard not only what is *in* him, but also what is *without*, acting on that *within*.

It is doubtful whether this ambition would have been absorbingly ethical, as well as literary, if his marriage to Miss Maria White had not directed his genius to the highest aims. She had been his next-door neighbor and his playmate from their childhood; she had poetical gifts which Lowell delighted to recognize; she

was beautiful in person, calm and commanding in manner; above all, her moral nature ruled, and she sympathized with every righteous and suffering cause. She stimulated the moral impulses of her husband, and turned what might have been merely light literature into a mighty influence for reform.

The woman's influence in this case was so great that we may be pardoned for introducing here the dedication of Lowell's first book of poems, published in 1841, and entitled "A Year's Life." It was addressed, really though not formally, to his future bride:

The gentle Una have I loved,  
 The snowy maiden, pure and mild,  
 Since ever by her side I roved  
 Through ventures strange, a wondering  
                   child,  
 In fantasy a Red Cross Knight  
 Burning for her dear sake to fight.

If there be one who can, like her,  
 Make sunshine in life's shady places,  
 One in whose holy bosom stir  
 As many gentle household graces,—  
 And such I think there needs must be,—  
 Will she accept this book from me?

The little book was full of allusions to his *inamorata*. One of its poems was indeed an elaborate and long drawn-out description of her. "Irené," in spite of its youthful effervescence, is a production of much promise; and, as disclosing one of the great influences that shaped his mental and moral development, it deserves our special attention. I quote only its first and last stanzas:

Hers is a spirit deep, and crystal-clear;  
Calmly beneath her earnest face it lies,  
Free without boldness, meek without a fear,  
Quicker to look than speak its sympathies;  
Far down into her large and patient eyes  
I gaze, deep-drinking of the infinite,  
As, in the mid-watch of a clear, still night,  
I look into the fathomless blue skies.

. . . . .  
Like a lone star through riven storm-clouds seen  
By sailors, tempest-tost upon the sea,  
Telling of rest and peaceful heavens nigh,  
Unto my soul her star-like soul hath been,  
Her sight as full of hope and calm to me;—  
For she unto herself hath builded high  
A home serene, wherein to lay her head,  
Earth's noblest thing, a Woman perfected.

The poet had need of a patient and strong companion, for his father's loss of property made marriage impracticable for three whole years, and threw him after his graduation from college entirely upon his own resources. He lived on the meager returns of hack-work for newspapers and magazines; and, since these gave him no more than four hundred dollars yearly, he was often in real straits for money. When at last, in December, 1844, he married, the pair lived for a twelvemonth on less than one thousand dollars, although from the first the wife was frail in health. Their married life was not free from sorrow. In 1847 death took from them their little daughter Blanche, and in 1850 their daughter Rose. In this latter year they were made happy by the birth of a beautiful son, Walter; but he too died during their tour in Italy in 1852. Mrs. Lowell never recovered from these dreadful blows, and she followed her children in 1853.

Lowell's financial circumstances had so improved that he could go abroad with his family. But sorrow did its work; his writing gained in depth and sympathy; he braced himself, not only to meet whatever might come to him individually, but to stand for truth and right in public affairs. The spirit of his wife influenced him, not only while she lived, but long after her departure. What has been well called "the steady and relentless progress of the slave-power" challenged his abhorrence and his opposition. As early as 1846 he engaged to write for "The Anti-slavery Standard" a weekly contribution in prose or verse, and this for a pitiful five hundred dollars a year. This connection lasted for four years. His work was not exclusively reformatory. Some of his poems, like "Eurydice" and "The Parting of the Ways," were revelations of his inner life. In "The Boston Miscellany" he wrote on "The Old English Dramatists"—and began a series of prose essays which has put him in the forefront of English stylists and critics. But it was only in 1848 that he scored his greatest triumph and won universal applause, by his publication of the first series of "The Biglow Papers." That this remarkable production should have appeared in the same year with his "Fable for Critics" and "Sir Launfal," is proof of Lowell's astonishing brilliancy and versatility.

The earlier poems merit consideration, since they show signs of genuine human feeling and flashes of poetic inspiration. But in them the poet is struggling with his material, and, like Milton's beasts at the creation, is not yet free from his earthly mold. In "The Vision of Sir Launfal" he reaches his greatest

height in pure poetry. That poem, indeed, has been called the finest idyl ever written by an American. Lowell's *forte*, however, was not pure poetry. It was not till he printed his "Biglow Papers" that he revealed his true nature, and gave full rein to his genius. That genius was ethical and patriotic. It was statesmanlike in its breadth and sanity. In his "Commemoration Ode" it appears at its best. But the poetry of this "Ode" is involved and obscure; and that of "The Cathedral" is even more so. In both these poems there is an air of overelaborateness. Never to the end of his days did Lowell achieve real simplicity. Only in "The Biglow Papers" does he write with abandon. In them his whole nature finds expression, as nowhere else. Wit and humor are his true weapons; when he uses them, his appeal is irresistible. In "The Biglow Papers" he reached the culmination of his powers, and exerted his largest influence. But, before we analyze these most characteristic of his productions, let us glance at the poems which preceded them, and which represent Lowell in the realm of pure poetry.

Let us begin with the poems suggested by domestic sorrow. His second daughter, Rose, died after a week's illness. "Dear little child," he writes, "she had never spoken, only smiled." "After the Burial" is Lowell's answer to a letter of condolence:

Immortal? I feel it and know it,  
 Who doubts it of such as she?  
 But that is the pang's very secret,—  
 Immortal away from me.

It is pagan; but wait till you feel it,—  
That jar of our earth, that dull shock  
When the ploughshare of deeper passion  
Tears down to our primitive rock.

Communion in spirit! Forgive me,  
But I, who am earthly and weak,  
Would give all my incomes from dreamland  
For a touch of her hand on my cheek.

That little shoe in the corner,  
So worn and wrinkled and brown,  
With its emptiness confutes you,  
And argues your wisdom down.

The frail health of his wife makes her presence more precious, and he offers this tribute to her ennobling influence:

I cannot think that thou shouldst pass away,  
Whose life to mine is an eternal law,  
A piece of nature that can have no flaw,  
A new and certain sunrise every day;  
But, if thou art to be another ray  
About the Sun of Life, and art to live  
Free from what part of thee was fugitive,  
The debt of Love I will more fully pay,  
Not downcast with the thought of thee so high,  
But rather raised to be a nobler man,  
And more divine in my humanity,  
As knowing that the waiting eyes which scan  
My life are lighted by a purer being,  
And ask high, calm-browed deeds, with it agreeing.

The "Ode," written in 1841, reveals the ambition of Lowell's youth. He aims to be nothing less than a new voice of Almighty God to suffering and sorrowing men:



In the old days of awe and keen-eyed wonder,  
 The Poet's song with blood-warm truth was rife;  
 He saw the mysteries which circle under  
 The outward shell and skin of daily life.

. . . . .  
 But now the Poet is an empty rhymers  
 Who lies with idle elbow on the grass,  
 And fits his singing, like a cunning timer,  
 To all men's prides and fancies as they pass.

. . . . .  
 Among the toil-worn poor my soul is seeking  
 For who shall bring the Maker's name to light,  
 To be the voice of that almighty speaking  
 Which every age demands to do it right.

"The Parting of the Ways" shows the growth of the ethical principle in the poet's mind, and his own decision to follow Duty:

Who hath not been a poet? Who hath not,  
 With life's new quiver full of winged years,  
 Shot at a venture, and then, following on,  
 Stood doubtful at the Parting of the Ways?

There once I stood in dream, and as I paused,  
 Looking this way and that, came forth to me  
 The figure of a woman veiled, that said,  
 "My name is Duty, turn and follow me."

There was a chill in that voice, and for a time the poet was attracted by the meretricious form of Pleasure, who proposed Beauty, instead of Duty, as his guide. But Death laid hold of Beauty, and buried her under a heap of ashes. Duty at last removed her veil, and the poet perceived that she alone was fair. It is an allegory of Lowell's life, and it indicates his final choice.

Virtue seems to have been its own reward, for this choice was followed by his greatest success in poetry. "The Vision of Sir Launfal" is the first fruit of his new consecration to the cause of humanity, and it is also the most perfect of all his poems. More of its lines than of any other work of his have become parts of our common speech, and are quoted by those who know nothing of their author. Indeed, when we have once heard them, how impossible it is to banish them from memory! I can mention only two or three; and these I take the liberty of putting together in a new order, so as to connect what otherwise would be only scattered fragments:

What is so rare as a day in June?  
Then Heaven tries earth if it be in tune,  
No price is set on the lavish summer;  
June may be had by the poorest comer.

At the devil's booth are all things sold,  
Each ounce of dross costs its ounce of gold;  
For a cap and bells our lives we pay,  
Bubbles we buy with a whole soul's tasking:  
'Tis heaven alone that is given away,  
'Tis only God may be had for the asking.

Sir Launfal flashed forth in his maiden mail,  
To seek in all climes for the Holy Grail.

As Sir Launfal made morn through the darksome  
gate,  
He was 'ware of a leper, crouched by the same,  
Who begged with his hand and moaned as he sate;  
And seemed the one blot on the summer morn,—  
So he tossed him a piece of gold in scorn.  
The leper raised not the gold from the dust:  
"Better to me the poor man's crust,  
Better the blessing of the poor,  
Though I turn me empty from his door."

An old, bent man, worn out and frail,  
He came back from seeking the Holy Grail;  
But deep in his soul the sign he wore,  
The badge of the suffering and the poor.

The leper once more confronts him, and asks an alms :

And Sir Launfal said, " I behold in thee  
An image of Him who died on the tree;  
Mild Mary's Son, acknowledge me;  
Behold, through him, I give to thee! "

The leper no longer crouched at his side,  
But stood before him glorified,  
Himself the Gate whereby men can  
Enter the temple of God in Man.

And he hears the voice of Christ, saying :

" The Holy Supper is kept, indeed,  
In whatso we share with another's need;  
Not what we give, but what we share,  
For the gift without the giver is bare;  
Who gives himself with his alms feeds three,  
Himself, his hungering neighbor, and me."

" A Fable for Critics " is amazingly sprightly. It is the first gush of Lowell's wit. Its novel rhymes would do credit to Byron. Yet, in spite of its constant hilarity, imagination and learning go hand in hand. It is a serious review of American literature, and it did excellent service in correcting the faults of our writing. We mistake, if we regard it as mere satire. There are, it is true, occasional touches of sarcasm, as in the mention of Bryant's chilly " iceolation." But in general the tone is kindly, as became a young man's criticism of his elders. Lowell makes Apollo the real

speaker, and before him pass in review all the main writers of the day:

"There comes Emerson first, whose rich words, every one,  
Are like gold nails in temples to hang trophies on,  
Whose prose is grand verse, while his verse, the Lord knows,  
Is some of it pr—— No, 'tis not even prose."

The comparison of Emerson with Carlyle is both sane and instructive:

"C. labors to get at the centre, and then  
Take a reckoning from there of his actions and men;  
E. calmly assumes the said centre as granted  
And, given himself, has whatever is wanted."

Alcott, Brownson, Willis, Parker, Whittier, Dana, Neal, Hawthorne, Cooper, Halleck, Franco, Poe, Margaret Fuller, Holmes, all pass under this rollicking and spicy review. Their little peculiarities and shortcomings are so gently and amusingly indicated, that the honor of mention far outweighs the pain of criticism, and the sufferers must themselves acknowledge that "faithful are the wounds of a friend."

Lowell's interest, however, was gradually turning from literature to politics. In public affairs he saw the greatest wrongs to be righted, and recognized his most natural field of action. His first remonstrance against slavery is found in his "Stanzas on Freedom":

Men! whose boast it is that ye  
Come of fathers brave and free,  
If there breathe on earth a slave,  
Are ye truly free and brave?  
If ye do not feel the chain,

When it works a brother's pain,  
Are ye not base slaves indeed,  
Slaves unworthy to be freed?

. . . . .  
They are slaves who fear to speak  
For the fallen and the weak;  
They are slaves who will not choose  
Hatred, scoffing, and abuse,  
Rather than in silence shrink  
From the truth they needs must think;  
They are slaves who dare not be  
In the right with two or three.

"Prometheus" is a like appeal for justice to the oppressed:

Tyrants are but the spawn of Ignorance,  
Begotten by the slaves they trample on,  
Who, could they win a glimmer of the light,  
And see that Tyranny is always weakness,  
Or Fear with its own bosom ill at ease,  
Would laugh away in scorn the sand-wove chain  
Which their own blindness feigned for adamant.  
Wrong ever builds on quicksands, but the Right  
To the firm centre lays its moveless base.

And his indignation culminates in "The Present Crisis," in which he urges the sons of the Pilgrims to war against the curse that then desolated our land:

Careless seems the great Avenger; history's pages but record  
One death-grapple in the darkness 'twixt old systems and the  
Word;  
Truth forever on the scaffold, Wrong forever on the throne,—  
Yet that scaffold sways the future, and, behind the dim unknown,  
Standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above his  
own.

Then to side with Truth is noble when we share her wretched  
 crust,  
 Ere her cause bring fame and profit, and 'tis prosperous to be  
 just;  
 Then it is the brave man chooses, while the coward stands  
 aside,  
 Doubting in his abject spirit, till his Lord is crucified,  
 And the multitude make virtue of the faith they had denied.

. . . . .

For Humanity sweeps onward: where to-day the martyr  
 stands,  
 On the morrow crouches Judas with the silver in his hands;  
 Far in front the cross stands ready and the crackling fagots  
 burn,  
 While the hooting mob of yesterday in silent awe return  
 To glean up the scattered ashes into History's golden urn.

. . . . .

New occasions teach new duties; Time makes ancient good  
 uncouth;  
 They must upward still, and onward, who would keep abreast  
 of Truth;  
 Lo, before us gleam her camp-fires! we ourselves must Pil-  
 grims be,  
 Launch our Mayflower, and steer boldly through the desperate  
 winter sea,  
 Nor attempt the Future's portal with the Past's blood-rusted  
 key.

When Wendell Phillips quoted this last stanza in his  
 Phi Beta Kappa oration at Harvard, it thrilled his au-  
 dience, and it has ever since been a veritable battle-  
 cry of freedom.

All this leads us up to what we must consider the  
 greatest achievement of Lowell's life—I mean the  
 publication of "The Biglow Papers." I call these his  
 greatest work, for several reasons: their subject was  
 great; their occasion was great; and both subject and

occasion engaged his greatest powers, and all his powers. Let us consider for a moment the situation of affairs a decade before our great Civil War. Slavery had ceased to be passive and remorseful, and had become aggressive and triumphant. Although Washington, in his will, had provided for the emancipation of his own slaves, and Jefferson had said, "I tremble for my country, when I reflect that God is just," the acquisition of Louisiana had opened so vast an area for slave labor, and the cotton crop had made that labor so profitable, that slavery was now justified as a divine institution, and all opposition to its extension was resented as an invasion of the rights of the South. Northern manufacturers and merchants who cultivated Southern trade were required to abstain from criticism of the peculiar institution. Even preachers in the churches saw new light with regard to God's decree of servitude for the black race, and the old freedom-loving spirit of the North was slowly but surely undermined. But there was slowly but surely rising a moral indignation before which slavery was ultimately destined to succumb, and Mrs. Stowe's "Uncle Tom's Cabin" and Lowell's "Biglow Papers" were both effects and promoters of that indignation.

Lowell had the advantage of Mrs. Stowe, not only in being the earlier, but also in being the more amusing writer. Mrs. Stowe drew upon men's sympathy; Lowell drew upon their conscience. Mrs. Stowe had more of humor; Lowell had more of wit. And wit played a part in this controversy that humor never could. Wit gave a sword-thrust, which showed that the author could fight, as well as write. It was

needed to convince the South that the North could not always be cajoled or intimidated. Southern leaders were sons of the early Cavaliers who settled Virginia, and whose conception of freedom was feudalistic. The king was free, they thought, and his lords were free, but not the king's subjects, or the lord's retainers. In our Southern States, the few slaveholders who managed the affairs of a whole county looked down upon the voters of a Northern town meeting very much as the Cavaliers of old England had looked down upon the Roundheads. Southern freedom was theoretical, but not real. Yet these slaveholders were convinced of their own superiority, and declared that one Southerner could whip five Yankees. Nothing but ridicule could pierce their pachydermatous sides. Lowell brought ridicule to bear upon them; but, in this very ridicule, he showed the true greatness of the Yankee stock, the thoroughness of its education, the soundness of its morality, and the fighting force of its theory of government. In this demonstration of Northern principle and efficiency, the dialect poem was a mere instrument, invented for a purpose; and that purpose, to prove that the despised Yankee, however humble he might be, towered far above the defenders of slavery, in every true attribute of manhood. While "The Biglow Papers" were Yankee in form, they were universal in spirit. They were products of the American soil, and they breathed the American independence, while at the same time they were nobly and profoundly human. They have no predecessors or rivals in literature, unless it be in the Scottish, yet human, poems of Robert Burns. They ran like wild-



fire through the country. They were copied with applause in every newspaper at the North, and with ob-  
jurgation in every newspaper that dared print them at the South. Lowell might have published poems by the hundred, of the ordinary sort, and might have found no great number of readers. But when these papers were issued in 1846, he woke one morning and found himself famous. I can quote only a stanza here and there, to show how perfectly they combine wit and sense, ethics and amusement. Let me begin with the utterances of Birdofredum Sawin, who represents the claims of the South, stripped to nakedness and reduced to language which the humblest can understand. They expose to everlasting contempt the flamboyant patriotism that can praise freedom in the abstract, while it grinds the slave under its heel. Mr. Sawin has enlisted as a soldier in the Mexican war, and is intent upon justifying that effort to extend the bounds of slavery:

Thet our nation's bigger'n theirn an' so its rights air bigger,  
An' thet it's all to make 'em free thet we air pullin' trigger,  
Thet Anglo Saxondom's idee's abreakin' 'em to pieces,  
An' thet idee's thet every man doos jest wut he damn pleases;  
Ef I don't make his meanin' clear, perhaps in some respex I  
can,  
I know thet "every man" don't mean a nigger or a Mexican;  
An' there's another thing I know, an' thet is, ef these creeturs  
Thet stick an Anglosaxon mask onto Stateprison feeturs,  
Should come to Jaalam Centre fer to argify an' spout on't,  
The gals 'ould count the silver spoons the minnit they cleared  
out on't.

But Hosea Biglow refuses to enlist, and scorns the enticements of the recruiting sergeant in the following vigorous language:

Thrash away, you'll *hev* to rattle  
 On them kittle-drums o' yourn,—  
 'Taint a knowin' kind o' cattle  
 Thet is ketched with mouldy corn;  
 Put in stiff, you fifer feller,  
 Let folks see how spry you be,—  
 Guess you'll toot till you are yellor  
 'Fore you'll git a hold o' mel

. . . . .

'Taint your eppyletts an' feathers  
 Make the thing a grain more right;  
 'Taint afollerin' your bell-wethers  
 Will excuse ye in His sight;  
 Ef you take a sword an' dror it,  
 And go stick a feller thru,  
 Guv'ment aint to answer for it,  
 God'll send the bill to you.

. . . . .

Aint it cute to see a Yankee  
 Take sech everlastin' pains,  
 All to get the Devil's thankee  
 Helpin' on 'em weld their chains?  
 Wy, it's jest ez clear ez figgers,  
 Clear ez one an' one make two,  
 Chaps thet make black slaves o' niggers  
 Want to make wite slaves o' you.

. . . . .

"I'll return ye good fer evil  
 Much ez we frail mortils can,  
 But I wun't go help the Devil  
 Makin' man the cus o' man;  
 Call me coward, call me traider,  
 Jest ez suits your mean idees,—  
 Here I stand a tyrant-hater,  
 An' the friend o' God an' Peace!"

"What Mr. Robinson Thinks" is a telling satire upon the slippery and mercenary policy of many Northern statesmen. It angered them, and for many years

Lowell was shut out from all places of honor to which they had the key:

General C. is a drestle smart man:  
 He's ben on all sides thet give places or pelf;  
 But consistency still wuz a part of his plan,—  
 He's ben true to *one* party,—an' thet is himself;—  
     So John P.  
     Robinson he  
 Sez he shall vote fer General C.

. . . . .

Parson Wilbur sez *he* never heerd in his life  
 Thet th' Apostles rigged out in their swaller-tail coats,  
 An' marched round in front of a drum and a fife,  
 To git some on 'em office, an' some on 'em votes;  
     But John P.  
     Robinson he  
 Sez they didn't know everythin' down in Judee.

Wal, it's a marcy we've gut folks to tell us  
 The rights and the wrongs o' these matters, I vow,—  
 God sends country lawyers, an' other wise fellers,  
 To start the world's team wen it gits in a slough;  
     Fer John P.  
     Robinson he  
 Sez the world'll go right, ef he hollers out Geel

And Increase D. O'Phace, Esquire, undoubtedly uttered the sentiments of many such, when he averred:

A marcifal Providunce fashioned us holler  
 O' purpose thet we might our princerples swaller.

But Peace comes at last, and Mr. Hosea Biglow salutes it, with sorrow for those who have gone to the war never to return, and yet with joy in the great future that now opens before our country:

Rat-tat-tat-tattle thru the street  
 I hear the drummers makin' riot,  
 An' I set thinkin' o' the feet  
 Thet follered once an' now are quiet,—  
 White feet ez snowdrops innercent,  
 Thet never knowed the paths o' Satan,  
 Whose comin' step ther' 's ears thet won't,  
 No, not lifelong, leave off awaitin'.

. . . . .

Come, Peace! not like a mourner bowed  
 For honor lost an' dear ones wasted,  
 But proud, to meet a people proud,  
 With eyes thet tell o' triumph tasted!  
 Come, with han' grippin' on the hilt,  
 An' step thet proves ye Victory's daughter!  
 Longin' fer you, our sperits wilt  
 Like shipwrecked men's on raf's for water.

Come, while our country feels the lift  
 Of a gret instinct shoutin' " Forwards! "  
 An' knows thet freedom ain't a gift  
 Thet tarries long in han's o' cowards!  
 Come, sech ez mothers prayed for, when  
 They kissed their cross with lips thet quivered,  
 An' bring fair wages for brave men,  
 A nation saved, a race delivered!

His lines on " International Copyright " might almost be thought a summing up of the whole doctrine of " The Biglow Papers," and they well describe his own work and influence as a poetical moralist:

In vain we call old notions fudge,  
 And bend our conscience to our dealing;  
 The Ten Commandments will not budge,  
 And stealing will continue stealing.

It would not be fair to Lowell, as we take our leave of his work in dialect, if we omitted mention of a little

poem which was originally composed merely to fill in a vacant page of "The Biglow Papers." "The Courtin'" is a New England idyl, deserving of a place side by side with "The Vision of Sir Launfal," though written in an entirely different vein. Nothing can surpass the description of the Yankee lover's trembling and embarrassment, as he entered the house of his beloved:

Zekle crep' up quite unbeknown  
An' peeked in thru' the winder,  
An' there sot Huldry all alone,  
'ith no one nigh to hender.

. . . . .  
He kin' o' l'itered on the mat,  
Some doubtfe o' the sekle;  
His heart kep' goin' pity-pat,  
But hern went pity Zekle.

. . . . .  
He stood a spell on one foot fust,  
Then stood a spell on t'other,  
An' on which one he felt the wust  
He couldn't ha' told ye nuther.

Says he, "I'd better call again;"  
Says she, "Think likely, Mister:"  
Thet last word pricked him like a pin,  
An' . . . Wal, he up an' kist her.

. . . . .  
Then her red come back like the tide  
Down to the Bay o' Fundy,  
An' all I know is they was cried  
In meetin' come nex' Sunday.

In January, 1855, Lowell was appointed "Professor of French and Spanish Languages and Literatures, and of Belles Lettres" in Harvard College, thus succeeding

Ticknor and Longfellow. He had written much for "The North American Review," and he had given a series of Lowell Lectures. "The Old Dramatists" had been followed by prose essays on many of the great names of literature, and he had won the reputation of our chief American critic. From this time, indeed, his main literary work was in prose. While its tone was more and more ethical and statesmanlike, there was an affluence of learning and a brilliancy of wit which made all his writings entertaining and memorable. Its defect was an overabundance of these very qualities. Wit is a very good servant, but a very poor master. Constant coruscations in the trolley car show that the electric current is not under complete control. Lowell is too much dominated by his wit and learning. Some of his articles remind one of Macaulay's earliest essay—the essay on Milton—which fairly bristled with antithesis and eloquence. The real thought is hidden beneath the analogies that are suggested by it. And yet Lowell is vastly interesting. "My Study Windows" look out upon a wide prospect, and one cannot read these papers without admiration and instruction.

On two great occasions Lowell was chosen to deliver poems, though his time of youthful spontaneity had passed. Harvard College sought to celebrate the valor and devotion of her sons who had fallen in defense of our American Union, and no one so fit as Lowell was found to deliver the Commemoration Ode. He spent upon it the labor of weeks, as he thought, in vain. At last a mighty impulse seized him, and in two days he produced an elaborate and noble

poem. Yet it lacked simplicity. Lowell's real vein had been exhausted. There was no place here for wit. Not all his powers could enter into the result. The poem won applause; but the applause was qualified. He was more statesman than poet, and more moralist than statesman. Yet the opening lines were worthy of the occasion, and worthy of him who uttered them:

Weak-winged is song,  
Nor aims at that clear-ethered height  
Whither the brave deed climbs for light:  
We seem to do them wrong,  
Bringing our robin's-leaf to deck their hearse  
Who in warm life-blood wrote their nobler verse,  
Our trivial song to honor those who come  
With ears attuned to strenuous trump and drum,  
And shaped in squadron-strophes their desire,  
Live battle-odes whose lines were steel and fire:  
Yet sometimes feathered words are strong,  
A gracious memory to buoy up and save  
From Lethe's dreamless ooze, the common grave  
Of the unventurous throng.

His description of Abraham Lincoln may be put side by side with Walt Whitman's "My Captain," as expressing the grief and reverence of the North:

Great captains, with their guns and drums,  
Disturb our judgment for the hour,  
But at last silence comes;  
These all are gone, and, standing like a tower,  
Our children shall behold his fame.  
The kindly-earnest, brave, foreseeing man,  
Sagacious, patient, dreading praise, not blame,  
New birth of our new soil, the first American.

And the closing lines of the "Ode" attribute to God the victory over our great national curse:

Bow down, dear Land, for thou hast found release!  
Thy God, in these distempered days,  
Hath taught thee the sure wisdom of His ways,  
And through thine enemies hath wrought thy peace!  
Bow down in prayer and praise!  
No poorest in thy borders but may now  
Lift to the juster skies a man's enfranchised brow.

The second important occasion for the recitation of a poem was the hundredth anniversary of the fight at Concord Bridge. This too was an improvisation, written only two days before the celebration. It ends with a lofty appeal to the Spirit that nerved the men of Seventy-six:

Freedom, not won by the vain,  
Not to be courted in play,  
Not to be kept without pain.  
Stay with us! Yes, thou wilt stay,  
Handmaid and mistress of all,  
Kindler of deed and of thought,  
Thou that to hut and to hall  
Equal deliverance brought!  
Souls of her martyrs, draw near,  
Touch our dull lips with your fire,  
That we may praise without fear  
Her our delight, our desire,  
Our faith's inextinguishable star,  
Our hope, our remembrance, our trust,  
Our present, our past, our to be,  
Who will mingle her life with our dust  
And makes us deserve to be free!

The years between 1857 and 1877 were the most productive of Lowell's life. His circumstances were favorable. He had contracted a second marriage with Miss Frances Dunlap, of Portland, in Maine. Elmwood, near Cambridge, was his commodious and beau-



tiful home. He was for two years the editor of "The Atlantic Monthly," and for ten years afterward was, with Charles Eliot Norton, the editor of "The North American Review." To this Review he contributed most of his essays. They were political as well as literary. They attracted attention by their breadth of historical outlook, as well as by their soundness of political judgment. In fact, the country had come to look upon him as its chief representative in literature; and when, in 1877, President Hayes made him minister to Madrid, and when, in 1880, he was transferred to London, the appointments were received with universal applause. Our country was never more nobly represented abroad. Lowell's wit and learning, his tact and sense, made him a favorite in society, the chosen speaker at public dinners, and at the same time the careful conductor of diplomatic negotiations. The British universities paid him their highest honors. His wife died in 1885, and he returned to this country, to spend his remaining years in comparative retirement, though he was still engaged in literary work. His death occurred in 1891, and his loss was mourned as that of our foremost man of letters.

Lowell's wit was so large a part of his endowment, that specific mention needs to be made of it. Its spontaneity was refreshing. It irradiated his speeches, his letters, and all his private intercourse. What can be more charming than the description of his trials in learning the German language!

What a language it is, to be sure! with nominatives sending out as many roots as that witch-grass which is the pest of all child-gardens, and sentences in which one sets sail like an

admiral with sealed orders, not knowing where the devil he is going to, till he gets out into mid-ocean! After tea, we sit and talk German—or what some of us take to be such—and which I speak already like a native—of some other country. . . The confounded genders! If I die, I will have engraved on my tombstone that I died of *der, die, das*, not because I caught 'em, but because I couldn't. . . The next day I was up before sunrise, and got into a habit of early rising that lasted me all that day. . . I have joined an Alpine Club, the members of which ascend the highest peaks by proxy, using an achromatic telescope to see others do it.

When Lord John Russell, with some fear that he might decline, invited him as "the most engaged man in London," he accepted the invitation as coming from "the most engaging man in London." Nothing could surpass his poise and mastery of a social occasion, so that his friends, on both sides of the Atlantic, were numberless. And yet his nature, lavish as it was, had depth as well as richness. At bottom there was a serious view of life, which qualified him to be one of the moralists of his generation. It was this gift which was most conspicuous in his address on "Democracy" at Birmingham, in England, and in his address in commemoration of the two-hundred-and-fiftieth anniversary of the founding of Harvard University.

"The Cathedral," originally called "A Day at Chartres," is Lowell's last notable contribution to poetry. It is full of thought and feeling, but the verse is intricate, and the meaning sometimes as obscure as Browning's "Sordello." The poet sees in the century-growth of the cathedral the type of all historic progress. That progress is rooted in the faith of the past; it witnesses to the need of such faith in these times which boast advance but may mistake the key:

I stood before the triple northern port,  
Where dedicated shapes of saints and kings,  
Stern faces bleared with immemorial watch,  
Looked down benignly grave and seemed to say,  
*Ye come and go incessant; we remain  
Safe in the hallowed quiet of the past;  
Be reverent, ye who flit and are forgot,  
Of faith so nobly realized as this.*

And its later lines recognize the indwelling God as the source of such faith, imparting it to every child, and helping every man in its expression:

O Power, more near my life than life itself  
(Or what seems life to us in sense immured),  
Even as the roots, shut in the darksome earth,  
Share in the tree-top's joyance, and conceive  
Of sunshine and wide air and winged things  
By sympathy of nature, so do I  
Have evidence of Thee so far above,  
Yet in and of me! Rather Thou the root  
Invisibly sustaining, hid in light,  
Not darkness, or in darkness made by us.

This poem forms the natural transition to a consideration of Lowell's theology. It was printed in 1869, before his public life began. He himself called it "a kind of religious poem." It is indeed a confession of faith, noble in many respects, yet lacking some of the best elements of Christian belief. "The Cathedral" will furnish us with material both for praise and for criticism. We may begin by pointing out that Lowell, while recognizing an immanent God, has no faith in a God who is transcendent, and therefore can believe in no miracle or special revelation. The closing lines of the poem make this plain:

If sometimes I must hear good men debate  
 Of other witness of Thyself than Thou,  
 As if there needed any help of ours  
 To nurse Thy flickering life, that else must cease,  
 Blown out, as 't were a candle, by men's breath,  
 My soul shall not be taken in their snare,  
 To change her inward surety for their doubt  
 Muffled from sight in formal robes of proof:  
 While she can only feel herself through Thee,  
 I fear not Thy withdrawal; more I fear,  
 Seeing, to know Thee not, hoodwinked with dreams  
 Of signs and wonders, while, unnoticed, Thou,  
 Walking Thy garden still, commun'st with men,  
 Missed in the commonplace of miracle.

Truth and error are so interwoven here that some insight is needed to disentangle them. The great truth that God is in all, and through all, is made to imply that this is his only being, and his only method of manifestation, and so to involve what Scripture would call a limitation of the Holy One of Israel. The apostle Paul avoids this error, when he declares that God is not only "in all," and "through all," but also "above all." "But a whisper is heard of Him," says the book of Job; "the thunder of his power who can understand!" To limit God to mere Nature is virtually to deny his omnipotence, and even his personality. But if God is above Nature, and not simply one with Nature, he can act upon Nature and apart from Nature, whenever there is need; and miracle and special revelation are possible.

The real question, then, is the question of need. Is there a moral need, which it is becoming that God should supply? Is the enlightenment, which the universal presence of God in nature gives, a sufficient en-

lightenment in man's actual moral condition? The answer to this question is given to us in John's Gospel, when the apostle asserts that before Christ came in the flesh "the light shone in the darkness, and the darkness apprehended it not." In other words, man's sin prevented God's light from having its normal and proper effect. Lowell's error with regard to miracle and revelation, then, is an error with regard to man's moral condition. He ignores man's sin and perversity, which "hinder the truth in unrighteousness," and which necessitate special revelation to awaken conscience and to draw forth repentant love. Such a revelation must make plain God's personality, his holiness, his self-sacrificing desire to save; and such a revelation is actually given us in Christ's atoning death and in his offer to deliver the sinner from the bondage of his sins. But Lowell seems to have no personal experience of his need as a sinner. He has no proper conception of God as the hater and punisher of sin, nor of Christ as the divine Saviour from its guilt and defilement. He rather prefers the pagan way of salvation, and trusts that man,

unconscious heir  
 To the influence sweet of Athens and of Rome,  
 And old Judæa's gift of secret fire,  
 Spite of himself shall surely learn to know  
 And worship some ideal of himself,  
 Some divine thing, large-hearted, brotherly,  
 Not nice in trifles, a soft creditor,  
 Pleased with his world, and hating only cant.

In other words, Lowell's God will be a God of infinite good nature, who makes no moral distinctions. Such a God will be no terror to the ungodly, and no Mediator

will be needed to make propitiation for men's sins. Christ is not "the fulness of the Godhead bodily," but only one of many guides and saviors, whose life and example have made the path of duty easier for our feet; and his Cross becomes only a model of patience in suffering the ills that afflict us all:

Whatsoe'er  
The form of building or the creed professed,  
The Cross, bold type of shame to homage turned,  
Of an unfinished life that sways the world,  
Shall tower as sovereign emblem over all.

With no inner experience of the grace of God in Jesus Christ, it is no wonder that the beliefs of the fathers should seem only the useful incidents of an historic past, and quite inapplicable to the improved conditions of the present day:

'Tis irrecoverable, that ancient faith,  
Homely and wholesome, suited to the time,  
With rod or candy for child-minded men.

. . . . .

Nothing that keeps thought out is safe from thought.

. . . . .

And Truth defensive hath lost hold on God.

. . . . .

Each age must worship its own thought of God,  
More or less earthy, clarifying still  
With subsidence continuous of the dregs.

But each man has within him the infinite Source, from whom have proceeded all the revelations of the past, and who is ready to give to us new evidences of his presence:

This life were brutish did we not sometimes  
 Have intimations clear of wider scope,  
 Hints of occasion infinite, to keep  
 The soul alert with noble discontent  
 And onward yearnings of unstilled desire;  
 Fruitless, except we now and then divined  
 A mystery of Purpose, gleaming through  
 The secular confusions of the world,  
 Whose will we darkly accomplish, doing ours.

And he does not deem himself recreant to his fathers'  
 faith, although

Its forms to me are weariness, and most  
 That drony vacuum of compulsory prayer,  
 Still pumping phrases for the Ineffable,  
 Though all the valves of memory gasp and wheeze.

. . . . .

I, that still pray at morning and at eve,  
 Loving those roots that feed us from the past,  
 And prizing more than Plato things I learned  
 At that best academe, a mother's knee,  
 Thrice in my life perhaps have truly prayed,  
 Thrice, stirred below my conscious self, have felt  
 That perfect disenthralment which is God.

But never has he prayed in sole dependence upon  
 Christ, or other than as one who comes directly into  
 the presence and favor of his Father. "Every man's  
 his own Melchisedek"—his own priest and his own  
 savior:

I think man's soul dwells nearer to the east,  
 Nearer to morning's fountains than the sun;  
 Herself the source whence all tradition sprang,  
 Herself at once both labyrinth and clue.  
 The miracle fades out of history,  
 But faith and wonder and the primal earth  
 Are born into the world with every child.

This may be theism, but it is not Christianity. The vagueness of its conception of God, its ignorance of God's holiness and of man's sin, the absence of faith in God's appointed way of salvation through Christ, show it to be a man-made scheme, incapable of giving relief to a burdened conscience, or of comforting a weak and afflicted soul. Man needs to see his own nature in God, or rather, needs to see God in human form. Hero-worship, emperor-worship, Mithras-worship, are all of them efforts of mankind to find a human heart in the Godhead. This universal instinct is satisfied only by Christianity, which shows us the eternal Word made flesh, yet exalted to be King of kings and Lord of lords. With James Russell Lowell's "Cathedral" I would contrast Robert Browning's "Saul"; and would maintain that this latter poem furnishes a far better basis for communion with a personal God, for comfort amid the struggles of our earthly life, and for courage in the performance of social and civic duty, than does the poem we have been considering. Listen to David's heartening appeal to Saul:

" 'Tis the weakness in strength, that I cry for! my flesh, that I  
     seek  
 In the Godhead! I seek and I find it. O Saul, it shall be  
 A Face like my face that receives thee; a Man like to me,  
 Thou shalt love and be loved by, forever: a Hand like this  
     hand  
 Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee! See the  
     Christ stand! "

What help did Lowell's religion give him in time of bereavement, and when he drew near to the gates of death? We have already seen that after the loss of his



child he confessed himself a pagan. He derived no comfort from the thought of a present Christ, into whose loving arms he could commit his loved one, with the assurance that she should be restored to him, when life's short day was past, but cleansed from the dishonors of the tomb and clad with immortality. When his wife dies, he can only write :

I can only hope and pray that the sweet influences of thirteen years spent with one like her may be seen and felt in my daily life henceforth. At present I only feel that there is a chamber whose name is Peace, and which opens towards the sun-rising, and that I am not in it.

He seems to have no definite expectation of seeing her again. His poem, "She Came and Went," expresses thankfulness for the past, but no joy in the present, and no hope for the future :

An angel stood and met my gaze,  
Through the low doorway of my tent;  
The tent is struck, the vision stays;—  
I only know she came and went.

Oh, when the room grows slowly dim,  
And life's last oil is nearly spent,  
One gush of light these eyes will brim,  
Only to think she came and went.

Christ has brought life and immortality to light in his glorious gospel. When Jonathan Edwards died, his wife, that saintly woman, was so filled with the joy of her Lord, that she had to hide herself from visitors, lest they should fancy that her submission to God's will, and her certainty of future reunion, indicated gladness at her husband's death. Thousands of

Christians have rejoiced that not only life, but also death, was theirs, and have been able to sing :

" Do we count the star lost that is hidden  
In the great light of morn?  
Or fashion a shroud for the young child  
In the day it is born?

" Yet behold! *that* were wise, to *their* sorrow  
Who mourn, sore distressed,  
When a soul, that is summoned believing,  
Enters into its rest."

But the best utterance of Lowell's hope for the future is found in his " Epistle to George William Curtis." An indefinite " Otherwhere " is his conception of the future life, and it has in it no connection with Christ, and no hint that there is " none other name under heaven among men, wherein we must be saved " :

I muse upon the margin of the sea,  
Our common pathway to the new To Be,  
Watching the sails, that lessen more and more,  
Of good and beautiful embarked before;  
With bits of wreck I patch the boat shall bear  
Me to that unexhausted Otherwhere,  
Whose friendly-peopled shore I sometimes see,  
By soft mirage uplifted, beckon me,  
Nor sadly hear, as lower sinks the sun,  
My moorings to the past snap one by one.

Lowell was a moralist, and not a theologian ; a theist, and not a Christian. It is an interesting question how far his conceptions of God affected his ideas of duty. What is the normal relation of morality to religion? I reply that religion is morality toward God, as morality is religion toward men. The two are meant to be

obverse sides of one and the same great fact of life. But human perversity has separated them; the one seems at times to exist without the other; we see religion without morality, and morality without religion. When thus separated, neither one is of real or permanent value. Religion without morality is a tree without fruits; morality without religion is a tree without roots. Human progress consists in the ever-increasing union of the two; human perfection will be attained only when love to God is the source of love to man, and love to man is the constant result and proof of love to God.

The moralist builds securely, only when the foundation of his system is laid upon the Rock of Ages. In just the proportion that he constructs his edifice without this foundation, he builds upon the sand, and time undoes his work. Or, to change the simile, ethics without God, by which I mean ethics which ignores the Christian revelation, is an orchid-growth, that lives on air; while Christian ethics is like the rose, which has deep root in virgin soil. The orchid has its beauty; but that beauty fades, and the light wind of passion sweeps it away; while the rose has a permanent loveliness, and a fragrance which the orchid never possesses. To apply my illustrations to the present case, I would say that Lowell, with all his moral earnestness, has missed the true theory of morals, and so has given us only detached maxims, truths which are the proper fruit of Christianity alone, and which, without connection with their source, lack both motive and life.

The ethics of the mere moralist are like the fruits seen on the Christmas tree. Apples and oranges, pears

and lemons, bananas and peaches are there. But they never grew there; they are only tacked on; when they disappear, no others will ever take their places. Lowell's social and civic virtues never grew upon the theologic stock which he cultivated. They were grown upon the old Calvinistic tree. When New England broke away from evangelical doctrine and swung off into Unitarianism, many of the fruits of the old religion still survived, and our poet made good use of them. It was not his theology that conquered in our Civil War; it was the old faith in a personal God, and in his ordinance of civil government, that nerved the hearts of our people. It was Bible preaching, and not moralistic poetry, that carried our country through the struggle for freedom of the slave and union of the States. And when faith in the Scriptures, and in Christ as our divine Lord and Redeemer, dies out of American hearts, no poetry of Lowell's will save us from national collapse and ruin.

I say these things with all proper admiration for Lowell's gifts and services. But let the moralist know his place. He is second, not first; the echoer of a tradition, not an original authority; and whatever of good is in him is due to the modicum of religious faith, which, consciously or unconsciously, expresses itself in his ethics. Something of that early faith still lingers in the verse of our poet; though lack of faith causes much of his work to come short of its proper depth and value. In what follows of this essay, I desire to point out the merit, and yet the demerit, of certain of Lowell's poems, resulting from the mixture of truth and error in his theology.

Take the matter of inspiration. In his early days, the poet had no faith in any impact of a superior Power upon the minds of men. All knowledge must come from within. In 1839 he wrote:

I have wondered whether you believed in the divine inspiration of the Hebrew prophets. Do you? I don't. I once thought it an argument in their favor that, in all the world, there has not, before or since, been any writing that compared with theirs in poetic sublimity. Now that I am older, this very thing seems to me against them. I think that if you compare it with that of our Saviour (whose inspiration I would be more willing to admit), you will perceive my meaning. *His*, you will notice, is prose; *theirs* poetic sublimity—and herein lies the difference between *inspiration*, or *perception* of real truth, and *enthusiasm*, or *longing after ideal truth*.

Yet, not long after, he himself had a revelation, and got a clue to a whole system of spiritual philosophy:

The whole system rose up before me like a vague Destiny looming from the abyss. I never before so clearly felt the spirit of God in me and around me. The whole room seemed to me full of God. The air seemed to waver to and fro with the presence of Something, I knew not what. I spoke with the calmness and clearness of a prophet.

As is often the case, from one extreme he went to another; from denial of all inspiration, he came to believe in the inspiration of all men, at least in favored moments of their existence. In "The Cathedral," Lowell declares his confidence that God manifests himself to all:

Man cannot be God's outlaw if he would,  
Nor so abscond him in the caves of sense  
But Nature still shall search some crevice out  
With messages of splendor from that Source  
Which, dive he, soar he, baffles still and lures.

In that noble poem, "A Winter-Evening Hymn to my Fire," he shows how God's gifts in the past may be utilized in the present, and may be made our own. Addressing his Fire, as if it were a living person, he tells of the wisdom which men divinely stirred have given to us:

Therefore with thee I love to read  
Our brave old poets: at thy touch how stirs  
Life in the withered words! how swift recede  
Time's shadows! and how glows again  
Through its dead mass the incandescent verse,  
As when upon the anvils of the brain  
It glittering lay, cyclopically wrought  
By the fast-throbbing hammers of the poet's thought!

How plain it is that Lowell's objection to inspiration is due to his identification of God with Nature! If God is only another name for Nature, he is immanent, but not transcendent, and he can manifest himself only within us, and in the way of natural cause and effect. We can deny the special inspiration of any, or we can affirm the inspiration of all. But if God is not confined to Nature, he can produce effects for which Nature is herself incompetent. Nature is not God, but only the partial expression of God. God is not confined to Nature; he can "cut short his work in righteousness"; with him "one day is as a thousand years." Lowell is right in affirming that God manifests himself inwardly; for there is a "Light that lighteth every man," and even conscience is an echo of his voice. But Lowell is wrong when he affirms that this is the only method of divine revelation. In every man there is a capacity for greater insight than he now possesses;

we all have occasional flashes of genius; telepathy and premonition show that there are hidden powers which are now unused. Inspiration is only the intensification of natural faculties, under the special influence of the divine Spirit; even prophetic inspiration is only the lifting of man up to heights of prescience and prediction which belong to him by nature, but which he has lost by his sin. Inspiration then is both natural and supernatural. The universal presence of God in humanity does not prevent, but rather makes possible, a special influence of God's enlightening Spirit in times of need. Again the question presents itself: Is there need? It is Lowell's insufficient understanding of man's blindness and sin that prevents him from seeing the possibility and the reality of special divine revelation. And what is true of inspiration is also true of miracle. The God of Nature can work apart from Nature, and can condense into a single act of incarnation or of atonement the whole meaning of the universe and the whole manifestation of his mind and heart and will.

Emerson has very properly been criticized for his "fatal indifference to moral considerations." It may seem harsh to accuse Lowell, our moralistic poet, of similar error. But his ignorance of sin and his misunderstanding of the character of God have sad effects in practical morals as well as in abstract theology. The moralist should, above all else, believe in the supremacy of the Right. *Fiat justitia, ruat coelum*, should be his motto. The demand of conscience that penalty should follow wrong-doing should never be ignored or explained away. Love should always be the servant of righteousness, and never its servant or master. God

has made death to be the sign of his estimate of sin. Physical death, or the separation of the soul from the body, is the outward symbol of spiritual death, or the separation of the soul from God. To abolish the penalty of death, in the case of the murderer, is to break down God's instruction of the race both in nature and in Scripture, to weaken the sense of mutual obligation, and to give free rein to human passion and hatred. Yet this is what Lowell does, when he condemns the poet Wordsworth for his defense of capital punishment. I need only quote a sonnet from each of these, to show how superior in moral earnestness is the poem of Wordsworth. Let me, however, begin with Lowell:

The love of all things springs from love of one;  
 Wider the soul's horizon hourly grows,  
 And over it with fuller glory flows  
 The sky-like spirit of God; a hope begun  
 In doubt and darkness 'neath a fairer sun  
 Cometh to fruitage, if it be of Truth;  
 And to the law of meekness, faith, and ruth,  
 By inward sympathy, shall all be won:  
 This thou shouldst know, who, from the painted  
     feature  
 Of shifting Fashion, couldst thy brethren turn  
 Unto the love of ever-youthful Nature,  
 And of a beauty fadeless and eterne;  
 And always 't is the saddest sight to see  
 An old man faithless in Humanity.

The "old man" was wiser than his youthful critic. He believed in Deity even more than he believed in humanity. And so Wordsworth has condensed into a single one of his "Sonnets upon the Punishment of Death" more of truth than can be found in all of Lowell's poetry:



"Is *Death*, when evil against good has fought  
With such fell mastery that a man may dare  
By deeds the blackest purpose to lay bare?  
Is *Death*, for one to that condition brought  
For him or any one, the thing that ought  
To be *most* dreaded? Lawgivers, beware,  
Lest, capital pains remitting till ye spare  
The murderer, ye, by sanction to that thought  
Seemingly given, debase the general mind;  
Tempt the vague will tried standards to disown,  
Nor only palpable restraints unbind,  
But upon Honour's head disturb the crown,  
Whose absolute rule permits not to withstand  
In the weak love of life his least command."

Lowell's theology appears most defective when he alludes to the doctrine of the atonement. He cannot understand that doctrine, because he has no proper faith in the holiness of God, or in the necessity of God's nature which makes suffering to follow sin. A holy God, who, for the sake of creaturely freedom and virtue, permits the existence of sin, must not only visit that sin with penalty, but must himself suffer with and for the sinner. Only love leads the divine Being to undertake this suffering; only holiness makes that suffering necessary. The Cross of Christ is the exhibition in space and time of this eternal suffering of the divine nature. The atonement is a substitution of God's suffering for ours, only as it is a sharing of our guilt and penalty by One who is the very life of humanity. Lowell's wit was never so misapplied as when, in "A Fable for Critics," he put in the pillory of his derision what he conceived to be the doctrine of the atonement as preached by an orthodox divine.

[Doctor] Cheever has proved that the Bible and Altar  
 Were let down from Heaven at the end of a halter;  
 And that vital religion would dull and grow callous,  
 Unrefreshed, now and then, with a sniff of the gallows.

Yes, the Cross was the Roman gallows! It was the deepest ignominy that man could suffer; and, because it was the very acme of earthly penalty, divine holiness bore it in our nature and in our stead, that we might go free. That Cross has moved human hearts to penitence, as no maxims of the sages ever could. It is the central fact of Christianity. Paul will know nothing but Christ, and him crucified; God forbid that he should glory, save in the Cross of Jesus, his Lord! When Lowell travesties the suffering love of a holy God, he not only goes beyond the bounds of rational criticism, but he discredits the only effective appeal to sinful hearts. How infinitely superior to this ridicule, as a merely ethical instrument for man's betterment, is the Christian hymn:

"Weary of earth, and laden with my sin,  
 I look at heav'n and long to enter in;  
 But there no evil thing may find a home;  
 And yet I hear a voice that bids me 'Come.'

. . . . .

"It is the voice of Jesus that I hear;  
 His are the hands stretched out to draw me near,  
 And his the blood that can for all atone,  
 And set me faultless there before the throne.

. . . . .

"Yes, thou wilt answer for me, Righteous Lord!  
 Thine all the merits, mine the great reward!  
 Thine the sharp thorns, but mine the golden crown;  
 Mine the life won, but thine the life laid down!"

It is fortunate that, in spite of these defects, we can praise so large a portion of Lowell's work. Though evangelical theology had lost its hold upon him, its ethics still survived. He felt their pull, and fancied that they drew him away from poetry. In 1865 he writes:

I shall never be a poet till I get out of the pulpit; and New England was all meeting-house when I was growing up. But I assure you I am never dull, but in spite of myself. . . Believe me, I was lively once, and may recover it; but I fear me I have suffered a professor-change that has gone too deep for healing I am perfectly conscious of it, and cannot yet help it.

All this suggests the question whether ethics and poetry, or religion and poetry, are antithetical to each other. Can a great poet have a moral purpose in his writing? Is the greatest poetry free from all intent to benefit mankind and to honor God? Was the "Paradise Lost" less of a poem, because it treated

"Of Man's first disobedience, and the fruit  
Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste  
Brought death into the world, and all our woe,  
With loss of Eden, till one greater Man  
Restore us, and regain the blissful seat?"

Was "The Divine Comedy" less worthy of praise because it professed to show the way from hell to heaven? Is Hebrew poetry less, or more, poetical, because it is full of the divine Spirit, and aims at bringing man into communion with God? It really is the old question of "Art for Art's sake," or "Art for God's sake." I think we can make but one answer: Poetry is great, just in proportion as it reflects the innermost reality;

and no poetry is great that does not bring the finite mind into contact and communication with the infinite Intelligence. Poetry indeed is the vision of the ideal which lies at the basis of the real, and the expression of that ideal in answering forms of melody and number. Poetry demands for its organ a complete manhood, and an atrophied religious nature is shorn of its proper insight and power. Only a coal from off the altar of sacrifice can touch the lips with heavenly fire. Lowell would have been a greater poet if he had been a greater theologian and a greater man. His influence will be fleeting, just in proportion as he lacked knowledge of himself and of God.

The essence of religion is humility—a humility that confesses its sinfulness and its dependence upon the divine mercy, and that submissively accepts pardon and renewal in God's appointed way. Such penitence and faith, in Jew or Gentile, whether conscious or unconscious, are really faith in Christ, the Way, the Truth, and the Life; and they make the soul receptive to the divine Spirit. Self-righteousness and self-dependence, on the other hand, while they may attract the praise and even the loyalty of men, are a bar to the entrance of the divine Spirit. Receptivity ceases, when a Stoic pride vaunts its own sufficiency. The great poets have always courted the Muses—the pseudonym for God—and have attributed their best work to a higher Power than themselves. Yet human faculties still work on, when this connection with God is broken; a sort of mental inertia keeps the machinery in motion; and we have poetry written by ungodly men. Let us be thankful that so much of it is helpful, though it comes short

of the highest excellence. I make no doubt that Lowell's stand for American democracy is a valuable contribution to literature and to politics. We are more independent of foreign opinion, and more ready to fight for our principles, by reason of his appeals. That the United States has come to be a world-power, and is conscious of its rights and dignity in the family of nations, is in some measure due to Lowell. This sense of civic dignity, like that of old when to be a Roman was to be greater than a king, rests, in Lowell's case, in spite of some theological aberrations, upon his ancestral and inherited theistic faith. In his "Ode for the Fourth of July, 1876," the concluding verses make this plain :

God of our fathers, Thou who wast,  
 Art, and shalt be when those eye-wise who flout  
 Thy secret presence shall be lost  
 In the great light that dazzles them to doubt,  
 We, sprung from loins of stalwart men  
 Whose strength was in their trust  
 That Thou wouldst make thy dwelling in their dust  
 And walk with those a fellow-citizen  
 Who build a city of the just,  
 We, who believe Life's bases rest  
 Beyond the probe of chemic test,  
 Still, like our fathers, feel Thee near,  
 Sure that, while lasts the immutable decree,  
 The land to Human Nature dear  
 Shall not be unbeloved of Thee.

I have been dealing with Lowell simply as a poet, and have endeavored to show how his training and his religious beliefs influenced his verse. We must remember that his later life was not that of the poet, but rather that of the student of politics and the man of

public affairs. He was greater as an essayist than as a poet. The instincts of the poet, however, never deserted him. The warmth of his affection was almost ideal, and it best expressed itself in memorial verses in honor of his friends. These verses show how greatly he valued courage and faithfulness in defense of the right, and they have a distinctly ethical character. The first of these poems is addressed " To John Gorham Palfrey," who had bolted from his party rather than support a candidate submissive to the encroachments of slavery :

There are who triumph in a losing cause,  
Who can put on defeat, as 't were a wreath  
Unwithering in the adverse popular breath,  
Safe from the blasting demagogue's applause;  
'T is they who stand for freedom and God's laws.

And so stands Palfrey now, as Marvell stood,  
Loyal to Truth dethroned, nor could be wooed  
To trust the playful tiger's velvet paws.

. . . . .

Oh for a whiff of Naseby, that would sweep,  
With its stern Puritan besom, all this chaff  
From the Lord's threshing-floor! Yet more than  
half  
The victory is attained, when one or two,  
Through the fool's laughter and the traitor's  
scorn,  
Beside thy sepulchre can bide the morn,  
Crucified Truth, when thou shalt rise anew!

Lowell sided with the weak who seemed to have no helper. His verses " To W. L. Garrison " depict the pitiful resources, but the indomitable will, of the first anti-slavery reformers :

In a small chamber, friendless and unseen,  
 Toiled o'er his types one poor, unlearned young  
 man;  
 The place was dark, unfurnished, and mean;  
 Yet there the freedom of a race began.

. . . . .

O small beginnings, ye are great and strong,  
 Based on a faithful heart and weariless brain!  
 Ye build the future fair, ye conquer wrong,  
 Ye earn the crown, and wear it not in vain.

There is a sonnet which must not be omitted, if we are to give any proper account of Lowell's friends. It is addressed to "Wendell Phillips":

He stood upon the world's broad threshold; wide  
 The din of battle and of slaughter rose;  
 He saw God stand upon the weaker side,  
 That sank in seeming loss before its foes:  
 Many there were who made great haste and sold  
 Unto the cunning enemy their swords,  
 He scorned their gifts of fame, and power, and gold,  
 And, underneath their soft and flowery words,  
 Heard the cold serpent hiss; therefore he went  
 And humbly joined him to the weaker part,  
 Fanatic named, and fool, yet well content  
 So he could be the nearer to God's heart,  
 And feel its solemn pulses sending blood  
 Through all the widespread veins of endless good.

And I must also, in all fairness, quote parts of the poem which he wrote to his best friend, his lifelong companion and colleague, and the editor of his "Life and Letters"—I refer of course to Charles Eliot Norton, from whom much of my material has been taken, and whose dominating intelligence and friendly criticism had greater influence with Lowell than those of

any other. This poem is the poet's humble confession of his own shortcoming at the age of forty-nine, when poetry began to seem a thing of the past, and his more strenuous public life was opening before him:

The wind is roistering out of doors,  
My windows shake and my chimney roars;  
My Elmwood chimneys seem crooning to me,  
As of old, in their moody, minor key,  
And out of the past the hoarse wind blows,  
As I sit in my arm-chair, and toast my toes.

. . . . .  
"O dream-ship-builder! where are they all,  
Your grand three-deckers, deep-chested and tall,  
That should crush the waves under canvas piles,  
And anchor at last by the Fortunate Isles?  
There's gray in your beard, the years turn foes,  
While you muse in your arm-chair, and toast your  
toes."

I sit and dream that I hear, as of yore,  
My Elmwood chimneys' deep-throated roar;  
If much be gone, there is much remains;  
By the embers of loss I count my gains.  
You and yours with the best, till the old hope glows  
In the fanciful flame, as I toast my toes.

Instead of a fleet of broad-browed ships,  
To send a child's armada of chips!  
Instead of the great guns, tier on tier,  
A freight of pebbles and grass-blades sere!  
"Well, maybe more love with the less gift goes,"  
I growl, as, half moody, I toast my toes.

It is the natural modesty of the man which sees, in what has been accomplished, only the suggestion of the greater work that might have been. One of the most pleasing indications, indeed, of Lowell's real character is to be found in his criticism of himself. It was in-



cluded in "A Fable for Critics," in order to prevent the public from suspecting him as its author. I have already pointed out the elements of truth and of error which it represents, and with it my essay may close:

"There is Lowell, who's striving Parnassus to climb  
With a whole bale of *isms* tied together with rhyme,  
He might get on alone, spite of brambles and boulders,  
But he can't with that bundle he has on his shoulders,  
The top of the hill he will ne'er come nigh reaching  
Till he learns the distinction 'twixt singing and  
preaching;  
His lyre has some chords that would ring pretty well,  
But he'd rather by half make a drum of the shell,  
And rattle away till he's old as Methusalem,  
At the head of a march to the last new Jerusalem."

This is a modest estimate of himself. But he does not understand the reason for his shortcomings. It was not his preaching that spoiled his poetry, but rather the fact that he had so little truth to preach. He was a moralist and a patriot, but his morality and patriotism were not sufficiently grounded in religious faith. God was to him too much of a Nature-God, and too little the God of the Christian revelation. The result was narrowness of range and deficiency in depth. He saw that "the powers that be are ordained of God"; but he did not see in Christ's sacrifice the motive for obedience, or the power to make men loyal. His appeals to good men are stirring, but when they fall upon unwilling ears they are drowned by the outcries of selfishness. His poetry would be more impressive and more lasting, if there were in it that vision of the Holy One which he lacked, and that inspiration of the Hebrew prophets which he denied.



VII

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES



## OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

LORD MACAULAY defines wit as the power of perceiving analogies between things which appear to have nothing in common. We ought to add a second power of apt expression, such as creates surprise or pleasure. How shall we distinguish wit from humor? Mainly by the difference in their intellectual and emotional accompaniments. Both wit and humor are products of the imagination. But wit is often cynical, while humor is compassionate; wit can discharge stinging shafts, while humor is always kindly; wit is more a matter of intellect, humor a matter of affection. Thackeray called humor a mixture of love and wit, and named Dickens as its representative. We have seen how greatly James Russell Lowell was indebted to wit, as his instrument in poetry. We may with equal truth speak of humor as the chief gift of Oliver Wendell Holmes. As we called Lowell our poetical moralist, we may call Holmes our poetical humorist.

Our poet was a great believer in heredity; and, in spite of his dislike to Calvinism, he furnished in himself a demonstration of its doctrine with regard to the transmission of hereditary traits. The element of vivacity in his mental composition was almost certainly derived from his mother, Sarah Wendell; and his bent to poetry may be plausibly explained as an inheritance from Anne Bradstreet, who was called "the tenth

Muse" in New England, and who was a remoter ancestor. Dorothy Quincy came nearer to Oliver in point of time; and he possessed a portrait of her which he has made famous in his verses entitled "Dorothy Q."—verses so sweet and so characteristic of his genius, that a few of their lines at least must not be omitted:

Grandmother's mother; her age, I guess,  
Thirteen summers, or something less;  
Girlish bust, but womanly air;  
Smooth, square forehead with uprolled hair;  
Lips that lover has never kissed;  
Taper fingers and slender wrist;  
Hanging sleeves of stiff brocade;  
So they painted the little maid.

. . . . .

O Damsel Dorothy! Dorothy Q.!  
Strange is the gift that I owe to you;  
Such a gift as never a king  
Save to daughter or son might bring,—  
All my tenure of heart and hand,  
All my title to house and land;  
Mother and sister and child and wife  
And joy and sorrow and death and life!

What if a hundred years ago  
Those close-shut lips had answered No,  
When forth the tremulous question came  
That cost the maiden her Norman name,  
And under the folds that look so still  
The bodice swelled with the bosom's thrill?  
Should I be I, or would it be  
One tenth another, to nine tenths me?

Our poet's father, Dr. Abiel Holmes, was a man of very different type from his wife. While she was bright, and full of the modern views then current in

New England, he represented the old-fashioned Calvinism. He was born in Connecticut, and he graduated at Yale. He married for his first wife the daughter of Doctor Stiles, the president of the college. For several years he exercised his ministry in Georgia, the most conservative region of the South. Then he returned to the North, and became pastor of the First Congregational Church of Cambridge. Ten years afterward he married his second wife, and nine years after that Oliver Wendell Holmes was born. "The Old Gambrel-roofed House" which he has so feelingly commemorated, was the scene of solemn lessons in the Westminster Catechism, which were given by his mother, although on her part with many a mental reservation—for she declared in later years to an old friend and servant, "Well, Mary, I don't know, but I am as good an Universalist as any of you!" Her son seems to have her in mind when he writes: "She, too, is the New England elm with the iron band welded round it when it was a sapling! But how she has grown in spite of it!"

The father was a handsome man, of gracious manners but quiet dignity. He wrote some dull verses, as many clergymen of his day innocently did. He was the author of a book entitled "Annals of America," an accurate and trustworthy narrative of our national history. But those were days of theological controversy. Doctor Holmes thought himself set for the defense of orthodox doctrine. His chief aim was to preach what he regarded as Scripture truth, whether men would hear or forbear. He did this with comparative mildness, and his son might possibly have

remained a believer, if it had not been for the occasional visits of clergymen who went to hyper-Calvinistic extremes. Their minatory preaching and their lugubrious demeanor repelled the sprightly boy, and he vowed to oppose and deride their doctrine. He outgrew the teaching of his father. From subordination he achieved complete independence, yet without sundering the filial bond which united them.

In his "Autobiographical Notes," which unfortunately do not extend beyond his college days, he has given us a very interesting account of his boyish reading. His father had a library of from one to two thousand volumes. The great English classics—historians, poets, and preachers—were there, and Rees's "Encyclopædia" gave a summary of all human knowledge. Into all these the boy dipped, without attempting to read any one of them through. Scott's "Family Bible," and Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress," awakened his antipathy, by what he thought their narrowness and exclusiveness. An original "Paradise" and the "Fall of Man" to him became fables. Already the study of physical science interested him more than did the views of theologians. Unitarianism showed its ill effects in his case, by making him a materialistic rather than an idealistic skeptic. In giving account of himself in those early days he writes:

The effect of Calvinistic training on different natures varies very much. The majority take the creed as a horse takes his collar; it slips by his ears, over his neck, he hardly knows how, but he finds himself in harness, and jogs along as his fathers and forefathers have done before him. A certain number become enthusiasts in its behalf, and, believing themselves the subjects of divine illumination, become zealous



ministers and devoted missionaries. Here and there a stronger-minded one revolts with the whole strength of his nature from the inherited servitude of his ancestry, and gets rid of his whole harness before he is at peace with himself, though a few shreds may hold to him.

Oliver's earliest memory was of the Declaration of Peace between England and the United States, in 1815, when he was six years old. He threw up his cap at the illumination of the colleges, as he was coming from the dame-school. A little later he came under the tutelage of William Biglow, the Master of the Boston Latin School. The boy seems to have been an apt scholar, in spite of his constant whispering; for the master, in passing, tapped him on the forehead with his pencil as his only punishment, saying that he couldn't help it, "if I would do so well." After the Boston Latin School came the Phillips Andover Academy. His poem "The School-Boy," read in 1878, at the Centennial Celebration of the founding of the Academy, tells us the feelings with which he began his studies away from home:

My cheek was bare of adolescent down  
When first I sought the academic town;  
Slow rolls the coach along the dusty road,  
Big with its filial and parental load;  
The frequent hills, the lonely woods are past,  
The school-boy's chosen home is reached at last.

. . . . .

Homesick as death! Was ever pang like this? . .  
Too young as yet with willing feet to stray  
From the tame fireside, glad to get away,—  
Too old to let my watery grief appear,—  
And what so bitter as a swallowed tear!

. . . . .

You were a school-boy—what beneath the sun  
So like a monkey? I was also one.

In 1825, at the age of sixteen, he entered Harvard College. The Class of 1829 was a notable one. It had fifty-nine members. Among them were G. T. Bigelow, afterwards Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Massachusetts; F. B. Crowninshield, Speaker of the Massachusetts House of Representatives; G. W. Richardson, Mayor of Worcester; G. F. Davis, Member of Congress; James Freeman Clarke, the well-known preacher and writer; Benjamin Peirce, the famous professor, whom Holmes describes as the "boy with a grave mathematical look"; B. R. Curtis, of the Supreme Court of the United States, the "boy with a three-decker brain"; S. F. Smith, author of "My Country, 'tis of Thee," "nice youngster of excellent pith." It was a day of rollicking good-fellowship, and the use of alcoholic stimulants, which was still common, made this fraternity the easier. Then began a series of class-songs and class-poems, in which the bacchanalian element is more pronounced than we find it in our latter days; it was even then, indeed, more of a pretense than a reality. Holmes was chosen class-poet, and he magnified his office, for I find forty-four successive poems which he read at the annual reunions of his class, until at the last meeting, in 1889, only three survivors were present. I quote from the poem which introduces, and from the poem which closes the series. The first is entitled "Bill and Joe":

Come, dear old comrade, you and I  
Will steal an hour from days gone by,  
The shining days when life was new,

And all was bright with morning dew,  
The lusty days of long ago,  
When you were Bill and I was Joe.

. . . . .

And shall we breathe in happier spheres  
The names that pleased our mortal ears;  
In some sweet lull of harp and song  
For earth-born spirits none too long,  
Just whispering of the world below  
Where this was Bill and that was Joe?

No matter; while our home is here  
No sounding name is half so dear;  
When fades at length our lingering day,  
Who cares what pompous tombstones say?  
Read on the hearts that love us still,  
*Hic jacet Joe. Hic jacet Bill.*

The last of these class-poems is entitled "After the Curfew":

The Play is over. While the light  
Yet lingers in the darkening hall,  
I come to say a last Good-night  
Before the final *Exeunt all*.

We gathered once, a joyous throng:  
The jovial toasts went gayly round;  
With jest, and laugh, and shout, and song,  
We made the floors and walls resound.

We come with feeble steps and slow,  
A little band of four or five,  
Left from the wrecks of long ago,  
Still pleased to find ourselves alive.

Alive! How living, too, are they  
Whose memories it is ours to share!  
Spread the long table's full array,—  
There sits a ghost in every chair!

. . . . .

So ends "The Boys,"—a lifelong play.  
 We too must hear the Prompter's call  
 To fairer scenes and brighter day:  
 Farewell! I let the curtain fall.

Holmes has told us that with him versifying began even before he had learned to write. His ideas shaped themselves in metrical form so early that he did not know when the poetic impulse first seized him. The first verses which appeared in print, however, seem to have been a translation from Vergil's "*Æneid*," made when Oliver was a student in the academy at Andover. They are a vigorous rendering of the passage in which Neptune is described as rising to quell the storm:

The god looked out upon the troubled deep  
 Waked into tumult from its placid sleep;  
 The flame of anger kindles in his eye  
 As the wild waves ascend the lowering sky.

Thus by the power of his imperial arm  
 The boiling ocean trembled into calm;  
 With flowing reins the father sped his way  
 And smiled serene upon rekindled day.

"Old Ironsides," however, was the first production which drew attention to him as a poet. That was the name popularly given to the frigate *Constitution*, which had fought so gallantly and successfully in the war of 1812, but which our Navy Department now proposed to dismantle and destroy. Holmes was angered by this proposition; he dashed off some indignant stanzas, and sent them to the "*Daily Advertiser*." They ran like wildfire through the newspaper press of the country, and with such effect that the tattered

ensign of the old battleship was not torn down. The spirit of their patriotic lines our poet never afterward surpassed:

Ay, tear her tattered ensign down!  
 Long has it waved on high,  
 And many an eye has danced to see  
 That banner in the sky;  
 Beneath it rung the battle shout,  
 And burst the cannon's roar;—  
 The meteor of the ocean air  
 Shall sweep the clouds no more!

Her deck, once red with heroes' blood,  
 Where knelt the vanquished foe,  
 When winds were hurrying o'er the flood,  
 And waves were white below,  
 No more shall feel the victor's tread,  
 Or know the conquered knee;—  
 The harpies of the shore shall pluck  
 The eagle of the sea!

Oh, better that her shattered hulk  
 Should sink beneath the wave;  
 Her thunders shook the mighty deep,  
 And there should be her grave;  
 Nail to the mast her holy flag,  
 Set every threadbare sail,  
 And give her to the god of storms,  
 The lightning and the gale!

But it was not in epic or heroic poetry that Holmes excelled. The distinctly humorous was his *forte*, and it is noticeable that some of his best work in this line was done in his very early manhood. Even in his latest years he never surpassed the sprightliness and pathos of "The Last Leaf," which was written only two years after his graduation from college:

## " THE LAST LEAF "

I saw him once before,  
As he passed by the door,  
And again  
The pavement stones resound,  
As he totters o'er the ground  
With his cane.

They say that in his prime,  
Ere the pruning-knife of Time  
Cut him down,  
Not a better man was found  
By the Crier on his round  
Through the town.

But now he walks the streets,  
And he looks at all he meets  
Sad and wan,  
And he shakes his feeble head,  
That it seems as if he said,  
" They are gone."

The mossy marbles rest  
On the lips that he has prest  
In their bloom,  
And the names he loved to hear  
Have been carved for many a year  
On the tomb.

My grandmamma has said—  
Poor old lady, she is dead  
Long ago—  
That he had a Roman nose,  
And his cheek was like a rose  
In the snow;

But now his nose is thin,  
And it rests upon his chin  
Like a staff,  
And a crook is in his back,  
And a melancholy crack  
In his laugh.

I know it is a sin  
 For me to sit and grin  
 At him here;  
 But the old three-cornered hat,  
 And the breeches, and all that,  
 Are so queer!

And if I should live to be  
 The last leaf upon the tree  
 In the spring,  
 Let them smile, as I do now,  
 At the old forsaken bough  
 Where I cling.

For a twelvemonth after his graduation from college Holmes studied law. But with no heartiness. "The seductions of verse-writing," as he says, made the year "less profitable than it should have been." From the law he turned to medicine. After two courses of lectures at a private medical school in Boston, he spent two years in Paris, the necessary funds being furnished by his well-to-do mother, the daughter of a prosperous Boston merchant. He seems to have been reasonably industrious, and to have made good use of his opportunities for medical education. Literature had not yet appeared to him as a possible vocation. The physical and mechanical always interested him more than did the philosophical or the religious. In Paris he saw the great actors, singers, and dancers; he afterward regretted that he did not seek out the celebrities in politics, letters, and science. But he devoted himself to his profession; stored up as much learning as good health and good spirits would permit; had some vacation experiences on the Rhine, in Italy, and in England; and returned to America with a small

but select professional library, with a modest stock of surgical instruments, and "with two skeletons and some skulls."

Then began twelve years of medical practice. He was somewhat handicapped by what seemed to many a lack of seriousness. When he invited the patronage of his friends by saying that the smallest fevers were thankfully received, they doubted the propriety of putting their families under the care of a jesting physician. In his poem entitled "Nux Postcænatica," he alluded to this bar in the way of his success:

Besides—my prospects—don't you know that people won't  
employ

A man that wrongs his manliness by laughing like a boy?  
And suspect the azure blossom that unfolds upon a shoot,  
As if wisdom's old potato could not flourish at its root?

. . . . .

It's a vastly pleasing prospect, when you're screwing out a  
laugh,

That your very next year's income is diminished by a half,  
And a little boy trips barefoot that your Pegasus may go,  
And the baby's milk is watered that your Helicon may flow.

But he made few efforts to extend his list of patients. Whether influenced by tenderness of heart in view of suffering, or by disinclination to endure watching and irregular hours, he contented himself with jogging on in a quiet way and letting others do the hard work. He thought the greatest advantage he derived from his official duties was the comfort of riding around, after a rather lively animal, in a "one-hoss-shay."

Seemingly careless and indolent, Holmes was notwithstanding a reader and observer, and he gradually



won his way to recognition in his profession. He gave a few lectures at Dartmouth College. Harvard at length offered him its chair of anatomy. Then he settled down into the regular lecturing which lasted for thirty-five years, and ended only when he gave himself wholly to literature in 1882. His standing in the scientific world is certified by his three "Boylston Prize Dissertations," and by his essays on malarial and puerperal fevers. His humor found play in a spicy attack on homeopathy, and in frequent poems read at the banquets of medical societies. Some of these poems seem gruesome to the laity; but I venture to quote from one of the most pleasing—I mean the poem which the author read at the dinner given him at the age of seventy-four by the medical profession of the city of New York:

How can I tell you, O my loving friends!  
 What light, what warmth, your joyous welcome lends  
 To life's late hour? Alas! my song is sung,  
 Its fading accents falter on my tongue.  
 Sweet friends, if, shrinking in the banquet's blaze,  
 Your blushing guest must face the breath of praise,  
 Speak not too well of one who scarce will know  
 Himself transfigured in its roseate glow;  
 Say kindly of him what is, chiefly, true,  
 Remembering always he belongs to you;  
 Deal with him as a truant, if you will,  
 But claim him, keep him, call him brother still!

Holmes's poetry would never have made him famous, if it had not been for his prose. It was his prose which first drew general attention to his poetry; some of his best poetry, indeed, was embedded in his prose, and illuminated it. Let us review the situation

when our poet reached the age of forty-eight. For seventeen years he had been happily married, and there were three children. Life had moved steadily on; he had an assured position in the scientific and educational world; but he was scarcely known outside of Boston. A great change came in 1857, when Phillips, Sampson and Company determined to establish a new magazine, and invited James Russell Lowell to be its editor. He desired to make it a purely literary publication of the highest order, and he "made it a condition precedent" of his own acceptance that Doctor Holmes should be "the first contributor engaged." Holmes himself declares that this flattering proposition waked him from a literary lethargy into which he had fallen. He rose to the occasion; gladly entered into this literary partnership; gave to the new periodical its name of "The Atlantic Monthly." Lowell afterward asserted that Holmes "not named, but made, 'The Atlantic.'" His first contribution attracted wide and favorable notice. It was the first instalment of "The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table."

Holmes was probably greatest in his conversation, and "The Autocrat" most perfectly represented this phase of his genius. Charles Eliot Norton writes of his "vivacious wit, throwing off sparks like an electrical machine." The company in which he mingled was most favorable for brilliant and gossip talk. Norton calls that particular epoch "the pleasantest little oasis of space and time" in New England. Its spirit was embodied in Emerson, in Longfellow, in Holmes, and in Lowell. It was an inexperienced and youthful spirit; but it was a happy one; it had the

charm of youth, its hope, its simplicity, its sweetness. Longfellow, Lowell, and Holmes were men of the world, but they were optimists. They were profoundly contented with themselves. Religion had a traditional hold upon them; but its creeds and forms had come to seem a bondage; and they took to ethics in place of theology. They were lovers of Boston, and worshippers of New England. They cultivated "the Boston dialect of the English language," and strove to make it universal. It was Holmes who named Boston "the Hub of the Universe." He was the center of this influential circle that thought to liberalize and civilize the whole land, and "The Autocrat" was the quintessence of his wit and wisdom.

Yet even "The Autocrat" was a revival. At least twenty years before the beginnings of "The Atlantic," Holmes had contributed to "The New England Magazine" two articles with the same title. At the time they were little read, and they passed into oblivion. When Lowell asked Holmes to be his coadjutor, the latter was seized with the happy thought of "shaking the same bough again," to see whether more fruit could not be gotten from it. He began his new work with the words: "I was just going to say, when I was interrupted," and thus resumed the talk of two decades past. The result was an astonishing success. The future of "The Atlantic" was assured, no less than the fame of Oliver Wendell Holmes. This success was due to his letting loose of a natural gift, which up to that time had been repressed. His mind was discursive, rather than philosophic; more jocular than serious; while yet his large stores of read-

ing and of observation furnished abundant material for talk upon every subject in heaven or earth. The brightness of his ideas, and the lightness of his touch made his articles telling. He disclosed the secret of his popularity when he said that these papers were "dipped from the running stream of my thoughts." The papers tingled with life; and they themselves will live, as the noblest product of their author's genius.

Yet we must not forget that two, at least, of his most charming poems formed a part of "The Autocrat's" stock. I quote first from "The Deacon's Masterpiece," as the best specimen of his humor:

Have you heard of the wonderful one-hoss shay,  
That was built in such a logical way  
It ran a hundred years to a day,  
And then, of a sudden, it—ah, but stay,  
I'll tell you what happened without delay,  
Scaring the parson into fits,  
Frightening people out of their wits,—  
Have you ever heard of that, I say?

The poem gives the history of the vehicle through the whole century, until at last the appointed day of its decease arrives:

First of November, 'Fifty-five!  
This morning the parson takes a drive.  
Now, small boys, get out of the way!  
Here comes the wonderful one-hoss shay,  
Drawn by a rat-tailed, ewe-necked bay.  
"Huddup!" said the parson.—Off went they.  
The parson was working his Sunday's text,—  
Had got to *fifthly*, and stopped perplexed  
At what the—Moses—was coming next.  
All at once the horse stood still,  
Close by the meet'n'-house on the hill.

First a shiver, and then a thrill,  
Then something decidedly like a spill,—  
And the parson was sitting upon a rock,  
At half past nine by the meet'n'-house clock,—  
Just the hour of the Earthquake shock!  
What do you think the parson found  
When he got up and stared around?  
The poor old chaise in a heap or mound,  
As if it had been to the mill and ground!  
You see, of course, if you're not a dunce,  
How it went to pieces all at once,—  
All at once, and nothing first,—  
Just as bubbles do when they burst.

End of the wonderful one-hoss shay.  
Logic is logic. That's all I say.

The Autocrat's stock included also the best specimen of Holmes's serious work—I mean “ The Chambered Nautilus.” If he is to be judged by the standard of pure poetry, this certainly is his highest achievement. I must therefore differ from his entertaining biographer, Mr. John T. Morse, Jr., who gives his preference to “ The Last Leaf.” Holmes was ambitious to be thought a poet, and not merely a writer of *vers de société*. Of all his poems, “ The Chambered Nautilus ” was his favorite. He copied it into a hundred albums, as the poem which best represented him. His own account of its production is psychologically interesting:

In writing the poem I was filled with . . . the highest state of mental exaltation and the most crystalline clairvoyance, as it seemed to me, that had ever been granted to me—I mean that lucid vision of one's thought, and of all forms of expression which will be at once precise and musical, which is the poet's special gift, however large or small in amount or value.

Here too I can quote only the first and the last stanza :

This is the ship of pearl, which, poets feign,  
Sails the unshadowed main,—  
The venturous bark that flings  
On the sweet summer wind its purpled wings  
In gulfs enchanted, where the Siren sings,  
And coral reefs lie bare,  
Where the cold sea-maids rise to sun their  
streaming hair.

. . . . .

Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul,  
As the swift seasons roll!  
Leave thy low-vaulted past!  
Let each new temple, nobler than the last,  
Shut thee from heaven with a dome more vast,  
Till thou at length art free,  
Leaving thine outgrown shell by life's unresting  
sea!

Some implications of this generally noble poem I must criticize, when I come to speak of our author's theological views. But before I can do this effectively, it will be necessary to acquaint the reader with certain other prose writings of Holmes. The success of "The Autocrat," of "The Professor," and of "The Poet," at "the Breakfast Table," encouraged him to make ventures into the field of novel literature. In the years between 1861 and 1885 he wrote and printed three works of fiction: "Elsie Venner," "The Guardian Angel," and "A Mortal Antipathy." These novels gave him opportunity to express his religious as well as his ethical convictions in a more thorough way than had previously been possible. Some utterances of "The Professor at the Breakfast Table" had provoked orthodox criticism. In his novels, Doctor

Holmes undertook to answer these criticisms and to enforce his own views. His novels are "novels with a purpose." He confesses that "Elsie Venner" was written "as the outcome of a theory"; and he tells Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe that he desired in it "to stir the mighty question of automatic agency in its relation to self-determination." Holmes is the most consciously and intentionally theological of all our poets; and I do him no injustice when I depend upon his novels for explanation of what is often enigmatical in his poetry.

Our poet was the inveterate hater of Calvinism, or of what he regarded as Calvinism. The particular tenet of Calvinism to which he objected was its assertion of inherited moral tendencies to evil. He maintained that inborn tendencies are physical, and not moral; due to outward influences and not to individual volition; irresponsible, and involving no moral obliquity. Calvinism holds that there is a universal hereditary selfishness which originated in a voluntary apostasy of the race from God at the beginning of human history, and that the solidarity of mankind has transmitted this moral taint to all subsequent generations. Holmes endeavored in his novels to furnish a merely physical explanation, which would eliminate the element of morality and responsibility. "Elsie Venner" is the story of a girl who all her life was the innocent victim of a prenatal rattlesnake bite, inflicted upon her mother. The snake-look in her eyes was a deformity and a hindrance to her moral growth and influence, but it was not her fault, nor the penalty of any evil decision. "The Guardian

Angel" attributes Myrtle Hazard's escapade, and her sudden paroxysm of murderous anger, to the strain of Indian blood in her veins and to the pride of an aristocratic ancestry; while the good impulse that saves her is derived from one of her forbears who suffered martyrdom under Bloody Mary. "A Mortal Antipathy" explains Maurice Kirkwood's misogyny by the misfortune he suffered when as a baby he was accidentally dropped by the pretty girl who carried him. His lifelong antipathy to young women was something for which he was not responsible—it was simply the reaction of his nervous centers against all creatures similar to her who caused his fall.

It needs no great knowledge of Calvinism to perceive that Holmes misunderstood the system, and that his own explanations of native abnormality were far less satisfactory than those of Calvin himself. Holmes regarded inherited evil states as the natural result of some infliction from without; whereas Calvin held them to be the moral result of an apostasy from within. Holmes explained them as effects of prenatal influences derived from our immediate ancestors; Calvin referred them to a fault on the part of the first father of the race, which transmitted a congenital selfishness to all his descendants. Holmes thought these tendencies to be merely physical; Calvin saw in them moral unlikeness to God, non-conformity to his holy law, and the germs of possible and even of actual transgression. Our poet's scientific studies here led him astray. He thought of evil as something physical. Man, in his view, is diseased, but not guilty. Man is not by nature alienated from God and in need of re-



demption; and God is not the hater and punisher of sin, but only the compassionate Father who pities and saves.

We must concede that New England Puritanism had hardened into an unpleasing creed. But it was hyper-Calvinistic, rather than Calvinistic; and it was this hyper-Calvinism, rather than Calvinism, which Holmes combated. Calvin himself never maintained that we are responsible for the sins of our immediate ancestors; and Holmes's argument, if directed against real Calvinism, encountered only a man of straw. The federal theory of imputation, indeed, was expressly designed to connect hereditary evil and responsibility altogether with the disobedience of our first progenitor. That disobedience was a moral decision, and it gave a congenital bias to his posterity. Subsequent sins manifest, but they do not increase, the hereditary taint. Holmes ignored its moral quality and the need of renewal which it implied. His own scheme attributed evil tendencies to unthinking nature, and gave no remedy for them, either in atonement or in regeneration. Calvin had a better explanation of hereditary evil traits than had Holmes—an explanation more consonant with Scripture and with reason. On the one hand, Ezekiel declares that the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, and Jesus says that the blind man was not born blind because of his father's sin. On the other hand, the Psalmist sees in suffering and death God's appointed penalty of sin; Jesus calls Satan a murderer from the beginning; and Paul asserts that by one man sin came into the world, and death by sin. The great philosophers seem independently to

repeat the teaching of Scripture. Aristotle says "there is in the soul somewhat besides the reason, which is opposed to this, and fights against it." Kant speaks of "the indwelling of an evil principle, side by side with the good one; or, the radical evil of human nature." And Bergson traces all back to the beginnings of the race. In his "Creative Evolution," he writes:

"Where does the vital principle of the individual begin or end? Gradually we shall be carried further and further back, up to the individual's remotest ancestors; we shall find him solidary with each of them, solidary with that little mass of protoplasmic jelly which is probably at the root of the protoplasmic tree of life. Being, to a certain extent, one with this primitive ancestor, he is also solidary with all that descends from that ancestor in divergent directions. In this sense each individual may be said to remain united with the totality of living beings by invisible bonds."


And I may also quote from Francis Darwin's address as President of the British Association in 1908:

"The view upheld by Galton and Weismann that ontogeny can only be changed by a fundamental upset of the whole system—namely, by an alteration occurring in its first stages, the germ-cell—is now very generally accepted."

Our poet believed most heartily in the physical solidarity of the human race, but he had no faith in its moral solidarity. Yet the latter is quite as demonstrable as the former. Without the explanation of inborn selfishness and suffering which an original transgression gives, the long catalogue of human ills must be regarded as the work of a blind nature and the proof of a godless universe. A good God permitting man's revolt is more credible than is man


mastered by evil impulses which have no moral import. Holmes hated Calvinism, because it held God to be the ordainer of all things. He accepted a materialistic idealism which subjected all things to an irrational and fatal necessity. If we must have predestination, we ought to prefer the predestination of a righteous and loving God, and not the predestination of a godless nature. Calvinism has nerved the hearts of men to fight for liberty; fatalism has made them cowards, that hugged their chains. If God is really an omniscient Creator, we must believe that he foreknew and permitted sin. But we can also believe that he did this in the interests of freedom and virtue, and that he will in the end justify his ways to men. The predestination of fatalism has no such comfort. Its God is a Juggernaut that ignorantly and ruthlessly destroys.

We cannot properly estimate Holmes's view of human sin, unless we connect it with his view of Christ. He understood neither the evil nor the remedy. His Unitarianism handicapped him at every step. He is a proof that Christianity without Christ becomes agnosticism and paganism. Dethroning Christ and counting him mere man, the Unitarian is left with a conception of God so vague and unmoral, that Stoicism and self-righteousness take the place of humility and faith. The Cross of Christ is no longer the symbol of God's holy suffering on account of sin; it becomes the mere witness to a martyr's endurance, and an encouragement to suffer for righteousness' sake. Christ, to the Unitarian, is an example, but not a Saviour; not one who bore our sins in his own body on the tree, and



by whose stripes we are healed; but only one who showed us how we may bear our own burden of sin and suffering. This throws us back upon ourselves; puts us where the whole world was in classic times. Unitarianism is not progressive but retrogressive thought; it returns to Judaism and paganism; so far as its hope of salvation is concerned, Christ has lived and died in vain. His life and death, indeed, are regarded as the unintended starting-point of an idealization of humanity. But that this idealization has ever been realized in history, or can ever be realized in a human life, we have no evidence. The Virgin-birth and Santa Claus, the Ascension of Christ and the ascent of Jack the Giant-killer, are equally idyllic dreams of the race's childhood, utterly discarded since it has reached maturer years. Christianity is a matter of imagination; it is poetry; there has been no incarnation of God, and no redemption by the Cross.

When New England broke away from evangelical theology, no real theology was left to it, and its gravitation was downward. The high Arianism of Channing gave place to the half-fledged pantheism of Parker; and Parker's faith or lack of faith was followed by the full-fledged pantheism of Emerson. More and more the spirit of materialism and agnosticism has taken possession of the Unitarian body, until President Eliot declares that other religions have equal claims with Christianity, and that Christian missions are needless and absurd. This downward progress is equally visible in literary history. The Unitarian poets prove its reality. Longfellow and Lowell succumbed in their



later years to the influence of Emerson, and became more or less agnostic; although, as Norton observes, Lowell tried in spite of himself to hold to his old beliefs. But in Oliver Wendell Holmes a new influence was added to the general literary and theological atmosphere of his time, namely, that of modern scientific research. Holmes was a physicist and a physician. The body dominated and explained the soul. Spiritual things were the outcome and efflorescence of the material. And so the theology of Holmes is practically the theology of Herbert Spencer.

Congregationalists furnish still another illustration of this *facilis descensus Averni*. They once were stout opposers of Unitarianism, but they are now on the same road to skepticism. In "The Outlook," Lyman Abbott is asked how a soul seeking after God is to find him. The answer should have been the answer of Christ: "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father"; "I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world"; "I will come to you, and will manifest myself unto you"; "Come unto me, and I will give you rest." Paul answers the question by saying: "It is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me; and the life that I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself up for me." In other words, the living and omnipresent Christ is God, manifested in human form, as the object of worship and source of power. But Lyman Abbott sees in Christ no such present Saviour; he finds in him only an example and a teacher; the mystery of the gospel is not Christ *in* us, but the

influence of a Christ *outside* of us, who lived and died nineteen hundred years ago, but who has had no direct influence upon the world since then. Through his words and example Christ has awakened new spiritual life in men; but the idea of his personal presence and union with our souls is Oriental metaphor. He is the Way, and the Truth, and the Life, only by proxy—only by being the originator of these when he was here in the flesh. Congregationalism is at the parting of the ways. It must either go forward to Unitarianism and agnosticism, or backward to the evangelical faith in Christ's deity, omnipresence, and living union with the believer. This is the essence of Christianity, and to give it up is to give up Christianity itself.

I have kept the reader too long from the poems of Holmes which illustrate these criticisms. I find even in "The Chambered Nautilus" the traces of a self-depending spirit, that trusts its own powers in the building up of character. There is no intimation that human nature needs renewal, or even assistance from above. No confession of sin is breathed upon the air. Regeneration is a word unknown. No suffering on the part of the holy God is needed to make reparation for sin, or to show the sinner the evil of his ways. No divine Redeemer brings him back to duty. Christianity without a Christ appears yet more plainly in the hymns which our poet wrote for public worship. They are hymns of praise to the God of Nature, and their poetical merit has gained them admission to the books of many Christian denominations. But they could be sung as well by Parsees or Buddhists. In the best of

them there is a mention of sin; but it is so expressed as to imply that sin is something outside of us, which veils heaven from our gaze, but which is our misfortune rather than our fault:

Lord of all being! throned afar,  
Thy glory flames from sun and star;  
Centre and soul of every sphere,  
Yet to each loving heart how near!

Sun of our life, thy quickening ray  
Sheds on our path the glow of day;  
Star of our hope, thy softened light  
Cheers the long watches of the night.

Our midnight is thy smile withdrawn;  
Our noontide is thy gracious dawn;  
Our rainbow arch thy mercy's sign;  
All, save the clouds of sin, are thine!

Lord of all life, below, above,  
Whose light is truth, whose warmth is love,  
Before thine ever-blazing throne  
We ask no lustre of our own.

Grant us thy truth to make us free,  
And kindling hearts that burn for thee,  
Till all thy living altars claim  
One holy light, one heavenly flame!

The God of Nature is recognized as dwelling also in the soul. But there is no recognition of his revelation in Jesus Christ, or of the need of any such revelation to procure pardon or help. The hymn claims favor without sacrifice.

Holmes called this "A Sun-Day Hymn," and it certainly expresses the consciousness of fellowship with God. We must believe that the poet's inner experience was better than his creed. Hyper-Calvinism so

repelled him that he gave little weight to the evangelical argument, and little weight to the testimony of Scripture itself. The words of Jesus, "Ye must be born again," never seemed to him applicable to himself. Regeneration was not needed by the Brahmin caste, any more than by Pharisees like Nicodemus. Or, shall we say that he was regenerate, without knowing it—subject of a second spiritual birth so early in life as to have lost all remembrance of the change? We must leave the question for a higher Wisdom to decide. Meantime we may appropriate the poetical fruitage of his better life, as it is given to us in his "Hymn of Trust":

O Love Divine, that stooped to share  
Our sharpest pang, our bitterest tear,  
On Thee we cast each earth-born care,  
We smile at pain while Thou art near!

Though long the weary way we tread,  
And sorrow crown each lingering year,  
No path we shun, no darkness dread,  
Our hearts still whispering, Thou art near!

When drooping pleasure turns to grief,  
And trembling faith is changed to fear,  
The murmuring wind, the quivering leaf,  
Shall softly tell us, Thou art near!

On Thee we fling our burdening woe,  
O Love Divine, forever dear,  
Content to suffer while we know,  
Living and dying, Thou art near!

Here it is Nature, and not revelation, which gives assurance of God's nearness and willingness to bless. And our assent is yet further qualified, when we find the poet excusing sin as the necessity of finiteness and



ignorance, as he does in his poem of "The Crooked Footpath":

Nay, deem not thus,—no earthborn will  
 Could ever trace a faultless line;  
 Our truest steps are human still,—  
 To walk unswerving were divine!

Truants from love, we dream of wrath;—  
 Oh, rather let us trust the more!  
 Through all the wanderings of the path  
 We still can see our Father's door!

The apostle Paul declares that "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." Holmes, however, conceives that we only "*dream* of wrath," when we ought instead to "*trust* the more." This suggests a third misapprehension of Calvinistic doctrine into which he has fallen. The first, we remember, was that Calvinism holds men responsible for the sins of their immediate ancestors. The second was that Calvinism holds to a merely physical transmission of hereditary evil. The third misapprehension, which we now proceed to notice, is that Calvinism leaves no room for human freedom, but makes our destiny depend wholly upon the foreordination of God. Calvin himself, however, declares that "the perdition of the wicked depends upon the divine predestination in such a manner that the cause and matter of it are found in themselves"; in other words, the relation of God to the origin of sin is not efficient, but permissive. Calvin held to the divine sovereignty and foreordination, for the reason that the creating God knew all that would come to pass, and therefore must be said in a certain sense to

have purposed it. But he also asserted the freedom of man to obey or to disobey, and he maintained that for the abuse of his freedom man alone is responsible. While all are involved in the sin of the race, the atonement is made for all, and "whosoever will may come." God's sovereignty and man's freedom are complementary poles of the globe of truth, and while it is impossible to see both of them at the same time, neither one of the two can be ignored without violence to reason as well as to Scripture. In thus vindicating Calvin, we charge Holmes with maintaining a fatalistic inheritance of physical evil, which deprives it of all moral quality, condones our conscious sinfulness, throws the blame of it back upon God, and so denies both God's holiness and his love.

How bitter and prejudiced Holmes can be, when he attacks what he regards as Calvinistic doctrine, can be seen in "The Poet at the Breakfast Table," who permits himself to write:

Where is the Moloch of your fathers' creed,  
Whose fires of torment burned for span-long babes?  
Fit object for a tender mother's love!  
Why not? It was a bargain duly made  
For these same infants through the surety's act  
Intrusted with their all for earth and heaven,  
By Him who chose their guardian, knowing well  
His fitness for the task,—this, even this,  
Was the true doctrine only yesterday  
As thoughts are reckoned,—and to-day you hear  
In words that sound as if from human tongues  
Those monstrous, uncouth horrors of the past  
That blot the blue of heaven and shame the earth  
As would the saurians of the age of slime,  
Awaking from their stony sepulchres  
And wallowing hateful in the eye of day!

The essay on "Jonathan Edwards" is also a notable specimen of our poet's theological animus. In keenness of satire it rivals his diatribe on "Homœopathy." Jonathan Edwards unfortunately represents hyper-Calvinism, rather than Calvinism; and much of our poet's criticism is unjust, if urged against the essentials of the Calvinistic system. Holmes shows how nearly he himself comes to admitting those essentials, when he says:

We are getting to be predestinarians as much as Edwards or Calvin was; only, instead of universal corruption of nature derived from Adam, we recognize inherited congenital tendencies—some good, some bad—for which the subject of them is in no sense responsible.

The real question at issue is whether these tendencies are moral. That they are moral seems to be the verdict of conscience and of Scripture. That verdict is supported by our conviction of the solidarity of the race, and by our inability otherwise to reconcile the existence of these tendencies with the holiness of a foreknowing and creating God. Shall we say that God visits suffering and death upon creatures who are without fault? Shall we not rather say that these evils are consequences and penalties of human sin?

We would not deny that Holmes had some excuse for his denunciations, in the extravagancies of certain hyper-Calvinists. His writing has perhaps softened the utterances of Calvinistic theologians. But conscience and Scripture stand just where they were before. Calvinism still recognizes the guilt of race-sin; while at the same time it acknowledges that actual sin, in which the personal agent reaffirms the under-

lying determination of his will, is more guilty than original sin alone; that no human being is finally condemned solely on account of original sin, but that all who, like infants, do not commit personal transgressions, are saved through the application of Christ's atonement; that our responsibility for inborn evil dispositions, or for the depravity common to the race, can be maintained only upon the ground that this depravity was caused by an original and conscious act of free will, when the race revolted from God in Adam; that the doctrine of original sin is only the ethical interpretation of biological facts—the facts of heredity and of universal congenital ills, which demand an ethical ground and explanation; and that the idea of original sin has for its correlate the idea of original grace, or the abiding presence and operation of Christ, the immanent God, in every member of the race, in spite of his sin, to counteract the evil and to prepare the way, so far as man will permit, for individual and collective salvation.

Theology must be judged by its fruits. A theology that objects to justice as the fundamental attribute of God, and that substitutes love for righteousness, ought to be more than usually philanthropic. I do not find that Holmes gave this proof that his faith was well founded. He was an industrious and trustworthy lecturer on anatomy. For thirty-five years literature was his recreation, until at last he was able to make it his one pursuit. But he always shrank from the reform movements of his time; and, except by his bright conversation and jovial humor, he did next to nothing to help on any struggling cause. James

Russell Lowell wrote him a most serious letter, in which he complained of Holmes's slighting allusion to "the abolition men and maids," in his Phi Beta Kappa address, and intimated that he would "expurgate the conscience altogether." Holmes made a long and rather weak reply, in which he declared that abolitionism was not his line of work, and that he was no reformer. As one glances over the welter of poems which he read at celebrations and public dinners, one is reminded of the lines of a somewhat similar poet, Thomas Moore:

"I feel like one  
Who treads alone  
Some banquet-hall deserted,  
Whose lights are fled,  
Whose garlands dead,  
And all but he departed!"

Society-verse has small meaning after a generation has passed. Holmes had little depth of character, and little sense of duty to his kind. His genius was pleasure-loving and pleasure-giving, and beyond the present he cared not to look. He touched only the surface of human life, and he could not permanently stir the heart or nerve the will. The homeopathic treatment which he so much derided in medicine he depended upon for the cure of the constitutional malady of human nature. But neither esthetics nor sociology will here suffice. Holmes's work was like the effort to kindle a coal-fire from the top. Christianity begins lower down; puts its fire at the bottom; touches the springs of action; kindles the heart. Holmes could not reach any great depth of truth, nor could he

exert any great force of influence, because he ignored the teaching of Scripture with regard to human need. "Deep calleth unto deep"—the infinite deep of man's sin and ruin to the infinite deep of God's mercy. Regeneration implies a sinful nature, inherited yet guilty; and such a nature Holmes derided and denied. It was the old story of the Fox and the Grapes. The grapes hung altogether too high for his short-legged understanding.

Holmes was no abolitionist. He connected himself with no anti-slavery societies. He could not forget his relationship to a patriarchal Southern planter, who treated his slaves as fellow beings, and attended to their religious welfare. Before our Civil War, Mrs. Stowe and he had some correspondence upon the subject of slavery, but Holmes could not be persuaded to take sides in the controversy which agitated the nation. When war actually broke out, however, he began to realize the danger of disunion, and he wrote a Puritan War-Song, which he entitled "To Canaan." I quote the first and the last of its stanzas:

Where are you going, soldiers,  
 With banner, gun, and sword?  
 We're marching South to Canaan  
 To battle for the Lord!  
 What Captain leads your armies  
 Along the rebel coasts?  
 The Mighty One of Israel,  
 His name is Lord of Hosts!  
 To Canaan, to Canaan  
 The Lord has led us forth,  
 To blow before the heathen walls  
 The trumpets of the North!

. . . . .

When Canaan's hosts are scattered,  
 And all her walls lie flat,  
 What follows next in order?  
 The Lord will see to that!  
 We'll break the tyrant's sceptre,—  
 We'll build the people's throne,—  
 When half the world is Freedom's,  
 Then all the world's our own!  
 To Canaan, to Canaan  
 The Lord has led us forth,  
 To sweep the rebel threshing-floors,  
 A whirlwind from the North!

In 1862, his song “ Never or Now ” appealed to young men to enlist in the army of the Union :

Listen, young heroes! your country is calling!  
 Time strikes the hour for the brave and the true!  
 Now, while the foremost are fighting and falling,  
 Fill up the ranks that have opened for you!

You whom the fathers made free and defended,  
 Stain not the scroll that emblazons their fame!  
 You whose fair heritage spotless descended,  
 Leave not your children a birthright of shame!

From the hot plains where they perish outnumbered,  
 Furrowed and ridged by the battle-field's plough,  
 Comes the loud summons; too long you have slumbered,  
 Hear the last Angel-trump,—Never or Now!

These songs were not, like Luther's, “ half-battles.” It was said that “ he wrote war-lyrics with too much finish to please; they were over the heads of soldiers.” He was more felicitous in his patriotic hymns. One of these he wrote for the great central Fair in Philadelphia, in 1864; another after the Emancipation Proclamation, in 1865. This last witnesses to a consciousness of the justice of God, which his previous

writings had not shown, and which was perhaps awakened by the terrible carnage of our battle-fields. His journey to the South to care for his own son, who had been wounded in the Federal service, was possibly the occasion of this new lesson in theology. It seems wonderful that Holmes could ever have put into a prayer the words, “Thou God of vengeance!” But, in those days, to many a Quaker, hell began to seem a military necessity. However we may explain the origin of the hymn, it gives us the most satisfactory theological utterance of our poet :

Giver of all that crowns our days,  
With grateful hearts we sing thy praise;  
Through deep and desert led by Thee,  
Our promised land at last we see.

Ruler of Nations, judge our cause!  
If we have kept thy holy laws,  
The sons of Belial curse in vain  
The day that rends the captive's chain.

Thou God of vengeance! Israel's Lord!  
Break in their grasp the shield and sword,  
And make thy righteous judgments known  
Till all thy foes are overthrown!


Then, Father, lay thy healing hand  
In mercy on our stricken land;  
Lead all its wanderers to the fold,  
And be their Shepherd as of old.

So shall one Nation's song ascend  
To Thee, our Ruler, Father, Friend,  
While Heaven's wide arch resounds again  
With Peace on earth, good-will to men!

Holmes was as far from being a transcendentalist as he was from being an abolitionist. It is almost amus-




ing that he should have been selected to write the "Life of Emerson." That memoir is sketchy and entertaining, but its author lacked sympathy with its subject, and had little knowledge of his philosophy. In fact, the tendency of his thought was in quite the opposite direction from that of Emerson. Holmes's biographer says truly that "he found it easier to get at the cranial bones and the brain-cells than at thoughts and mental processes." Emerson was fundamentally an idealist, while Holmes was fundamentally a materialist. Neither one of them was a philosopher, in the sense of having a consistent and completed system. The result, in Holmes's "Life of Emerson," is a brilliant but superficial survey of his subject, without perception of its deeper relations to literature or to life. The intercourse of the two men had never been frequent or intimate. They understood one another, only as occasional guests at the same table learn of their companions from the talk of the dinner. They agreed in their deterministic creed, and in their aversion to organized societies for reform. But they were far apart in their conceptions of the universe: Holmes was more of a theist; Emerson more of a pantheist. Holmes had more of fancy, Emerson more of imagination. The New England conscience was still alive in Holmes, while intellect was the main characteristic of Emerson. Yet Holmes has done us good service in perpetuating the memory of Emerson's personal traits and peculiarities. It almost seems as if Emerson's lofty idealism had smitten Holmes with inquiring but hopeless awe. In the Introduction to "A Mortal Antipathy," Holmes writes of Emerson:



It is a great privilege to have lived so long in the society of such a man. "He nothing common" said, "or mean." He was always the same pure and high-souled companion. After being with him, virtue seemed as natural to man as its opposite did according to the old theologies. But how to let one's self down from the high level of such a character to one's own poor standard? I trust that the influence of this long intellectual and spiritual companionship never absolutely leaves one who has lived in it. It may come to him in the form of self-reproach that he falls so far short of the superior being who has been so long the object of his contemplation.

"This long intellectual and spiritual companionship," it must be remembered, was a companionship with Emerson's books and relics after Emerson's death. Holmes was the recipient of a posthumous influence from Emerson's writings far greater than any which he received while Emerson was alive. One other biography was written with more intimate knowledge—I mean Holmes's "Memoir of Motley." John Lothrop Motley was for years a trusted correspondent of Holmes—not even Lowell was so much his confidant. Our poet indeed was not a great letter-writer: but upon Holmes both Lowell and Motley, during their diplomatic service abroad, depended for information with regard to society and politics at home. Holmes's letters show much sagacity, in spite of the narrow round of his occupations. The "Memoir of Motley" lacks the breadth of view which foreign life and travel would have given, but it is a praiseworthy effort to make known the merits of a friend who had suffered unjust reproach. No other work of Holmes reveals so fully the sympathy of his heart, as do the letters he wrote to Motley upon the death of his wife. I quote from them only a few sentences:



My dear Motley,—I read your letter with feelings I could not restrain—how could I read such a letter unmoved? . . . Every word you say goes to my heart as to that of a friend who knows better than most can know what she was who was the life of your life. . . . I dare not attempt to console a grief like yours. . . . If you were here, I might sit by you in silence, just to give you the feeling that some one was with you in the shadow for the moment. . . . We never know each other until we have come together in the hour of trial. . . . I cannot tell you all that I feel I owe to you for making life more real, more sincere, more profound in its significance, during those hours I spent with you. To be told, as I have been, that they were comforting to you is a great happiness to me. . . . My life has run in a deeper channel since the hours I spent in your society last summer. They come back to me from time to time, like visitations from another and higher sphere. No,—I never felt the depths and the heights of sorrow so before; and I count it as a rare privilege that I could be with you so often at one of those periods when the sharpest impressions are taken from the seal of friendship.

Holmes did not write many memorial verses; the elegiac and the funereal were not natural to him. But now and then the beauty of a life that had just passed from earth so challenged his admiration that he could not resist the impulse to commemorate it. He lived to see many noble friends precede him to their burial. He wrote poems or hymns in memory of Everett, Garfield, Sumner, Howe, Peirce, Andrew, Parkman, Whittier, Longfellow, and Lowell. But his best productions were those of welcome or farewell to living men of note, delivered at public dinners in their honor. Such were the tributes given to Peabody, Hedge, Gould, Collins, Clarke, Agassiz, Farragut, Hayes, and Grant. Each of these memorials is noteworthy for its subtle delineation of character, or for its revelation of the poet's geniality and sympathy. In my selection of

specimen verses I must confine myself to three, and first of all must quote the poet's "Parting Health" to Motley, upon his return to England in 1857, after his publication of the "History of the Dutch Republic":

Yes, we knew we must lose him,—though friendship may  
claim

To blend her green leaves with the laurels of fame;  
Though fondly, at parting, we call him our own,  
'Tis the whisper of love when the bugle has blown.

. . . . .

So fill a bright cup with the sunlight that gushed  
When the dead summer's jewels were trampled and crushed;  
THE TRUE KNIGHT OF LEARNING,—the world holds him dear,—  
Love bless him, Joy crown him, God speed his career!

In 1865, Holmes wrote "A Farewell to Agassiz,"  
on the eve of the great naturalist's journey to Brazil:

How the mountains talked together,  
Looking down upon the weather,  
When they heard our friend had planned his  
Little trip among the Andes!  
How they'll bare their snowy scalps  
To the climber of the Alps  
When the cry goes through their passes,  
"Here comes the great Agassiz!"  
"Yes, I'm tall," says Chimborazo,  
"But I wait for him to say so,—  
That's the only thing that lacks,—he  
Must see me, Cotopaxi!"

. . . . .

Till the fossil echoes roar;  
While the mighty megalosaurus  
Leads the palæozoic chorus,—  
God bless the great Professor,  
And the land his proud possessor,—  
Bless them now and evermore!

And on the seventieth birthday of Harriet Beecher Stowe, in 1882, Holmes addressed to her two poems. The first was entitled "At the Summit," and it began:

Sister, we bid you welcome,—we who stand  
 On the high table-land;  
 We who have climbed life's slippery Alpine slope,  
 And rest, still leaning on the staff of hope,  
 Looking along the silent Mer de Glace,  
 Leading our footsteps where the dark crevasse  
 Yawns in the frozen sea we all must pass,—  
 Sister, we clasp your hand!

The second of these poems is named "The World's Homage." Its first lines are:

If every tongue that speaks her praise  
 For whom I shape my tinkling phrase  
 Were summoned to the table,  
 The vocal chorus that would meet  
 Of mingling accents harsh or sweet,  
 From every land and tribe, would beat  
 The polyglots at Babel.

. . . . .

And the last stanza is the following:

When Truth herself was Slavery's slave,  
 Thy hand the prisoned suppliant gave  
 The rainbow wings of fiction,  
 And Truth who soared descends to-day  
 Bearing an angel's wreath away,  
 Its lilies at thy feet to lay  
 With Heaven's own benediction.

Holmes well knew how fleeting was the significance of poems such as these. "You understand," he said, "the difference between fireworks on the evening of July Fourth, and the look of the frames the next morning." He was content to give even temporary pleasure.

Let me not be understood as depreciating his peculiar gift. He was an entertainer, rather than a teacher. He added to the gaiety of life. He cheered and comforted, lightened care, diverted the sorrowing. His was the ministry of humor. Shall we say that our chief poetical humorist has no proper place in the great singing choir? Rather let us be thankful that poetry is so wide a realm that it can include innocent mirth. John Milton was a serious poet, yet he wrote:

"Haste thee, Nymph, and bring with thee  
Jest, and youthful Jollity,  
Quips, and Cranks, and wanton Wiles,  
Nods, and Becks, and wreathed Smiles,  
Such as hang on Hebe's cheek,  
And love to live in dimples sleek;  
Sport, that wrinkled Care derides,  
And Laughter holding both his sides."

Holmes was a chronic protest against the narrowness of Puritan religion. True religion aims to possess and to develop the whole man, to stimulate and ennoble all his powers, to bring these powers to full flower and expression. The one defect of Shakespeare is not his consecration of humor, but his neglect of the spiritual element in man. The defect in Holmes is not his effervescent humor, but his ignorance of spiritual realities, and his consequent overvaluation of the seen and temporal. To this was added a positive fault of which Shakespeare was not guilty, namely, an attack upon the teaching of Scripture and the settled beliefs of the Christian church. Like Shakespeare, he was a poet of this life, but not of the life to come. We turn to him in vain for words that will give hope

to the conscious sinner, or assurance to the dying. He lived a long life, and died at the age of eighty-five. Deafness interfered with his social enjoyments, but an abstemious diet and regular habits of sleep and exercise made him industrious to the end. His "Hundred Days in Europe" is the spicy record of a continuous ovation abroad, during which he was honored with the highest degrees of the British universities, and was made the lion of London society. At Cambridge, the undergraduates saluted with the song, "Holmes, sweet Holmes"; and at Oxford a student cried out, "Did you come in your One-Hoss-Shay"? This English tour was his only period of travel since his first stay abroad fifty-three years before. But to all observers he seemed as fresh and sparkling as in the days of his youth. Some of his latest poems indeed give proof that his humor was an endowment that age could not stale or wither.

I cannot complete this picture of the poet without furnishing evidence that this last statement is true. Let me quote from a few of Holmes's last productions to prove my point. The poem entitled "The Broomstick Train; or, The Return of the Witches," commemorates the terrible witchcraft delusion of 1692:

Look out! Look out, boys! Clear the track!  
 The witches are here! They've all come back!  
 They hanged them high,—No use! No use!  
 What cares a witch for a hangman's noose?  
 They buried them deep, but they wouldn't lie still,  
 For cats and witches are hard to kill;  
 They swore they should n't and would n't die,—  
 Books said they did, but they lie! they lie!

A couple of hundred years or so,  
They had knocked about in the world below,  
When an Essex Deacon dropped in to call,  
And a homesick feeling seized them all;  
For he came from a place they knew full well,  
And many a tale he had to tell.  
They longed to visit the haunts of men,  
To see the old dwellings they knew again,  
And ride on their broomsticks all around  
Their wide domain of unhallowed ground.

The poet humorously sees the witches now at work in  
the modern ~~motor~~-car, with its mysterious motion  
without mule or horse:

Since then on many a car you 'll see  
A broomstick plain as plain can be;  
On every stick there 's a witch astride,—  
The string you see to her leg is tied.  
She will do a mischief if she can,  
But the string is held by a careful man,  
And whenever the evil-minded witch  
Would cut some caper, he gives a twitch.  
As for the hag, you can't see her,  
But hark! you can hear her black cat's purr,  
And now and then, as a car goes by,  
You may catch a gleam from her wicked eye.  
Often you've looked on a rushing train,  
But just what moved it was not so plain.  
It couldn't be those wires above,  
For they could neither pull nor shove;  
Where was the motor that made it go  
You could n't guess, *but now you know.*

Remember my rhymes when you ride again  
On the rattling rail by the broomstick train!

"Grandmother's Story of Bunker Hill Battle"  
might almost persuade us that Holmes was himself a  
looker-on at that famous fight:



'Tis like stirring living embers when, at eighty, one remembers  
All the achings and the quakings of “the times that tried  
men’s souls”;  
When I talk of *Whig* and *Tory*, when I tell the *Rebel* story,  
To you the words are ashes, but to me they’re burning coals.

Grandmother had nursed a young Continental soldier  
who had been wounded in the battle:

For they all thought he was dying, as they gathered round  
him crying,—  
And they said, “Oh, how they’ll miss him!” and, “What *will*  
his mother do?”  
Then, his eyelids just unclosing like a child’s that has been  
dozing,  
He faintly murmured, “Mother!”—and—I saw his eyes were  
blue.

“Why, grandma, how you’re winking!” Ah, my child, it sets  
me thinking  
Of a story not like this one. Well, he somehow lived along;  
So we came to know each other, and I nursed him like a—  
mother,  
Till at last he stood before me, tall, and rosy-cheeked, and  
strong.

And we sometimes walked together in the pleasant summer  
weather,—  
“Please to tell us what his name was?” Just your own, my  
little dear,—  
There’s his picture Copley painted: we became so well  
acquainted,  
That—in short, that’s why I’m grandma, and you children all  
are here.

“How the Old Horse won the Bet” is the story of a  
parson’s “lean and bony bay” which, “lent to the sexton”  
to attend an alleged funeral, surprised the crowd  
at the race-track:

The parson's horse had won the bet;  
 It cost him something of a sweat;  
 Back in the one-horse shay he went;  
 The parson wondered what it meant,  
 And murmured, with a mild surprise  
 And pleasant twinkle of the eyes,  
 "That funeral must have been a trick,  
 Or corpses drive at double-quick;  
 I should n't wonder, I declare,  
 If brother—Jehu—made the prayer!"

And this is all I have to say  
 About that tough old trotting bay,  
 Huddup! Huddup! G'lang! Good day!

Moral for which this tale is told:  
 A horse *can* trot, for all he's old.

At the breakfast given in honor of Doctor Holmes's seventieth birthday by the publishers of "The Atlantic Monthly," in 1879, he read his poem "The Iron Gate." It so well represents the spirit of his closing years, that I reproduce some fragments of it:

Where is this patriarch you are kindly greeting?  
 Not unfamiliar to my ear his name,  
 Nor yet unknown to many a joyous meeting  
 In days long vanished,—is he still the same?

Or changed by years, forgotten and forgetting,  
 Dull-eared, dim-sighted, slow of speech and thought,  
 Still o'er the sad, degenerate present fretting,  
 Where all goes wrong, and nothing as it ought?

. . . . .

Youth longs and manhood strives, but age remembers,  
 Sits by the raked-up ashes of the past,  
 Spreads its thin hands above the whitening embers  
 That warm its creeping life-blood till the last.

Dear to its heart is every loving token  
 That comes unbidden ere its pulse grows cold,  
 Ere the last lingering ties of life are broken,  
 Its labors ended and its story told.

. . . . .

Time claims his tribute: silence now is golden;  
 Let me not vex the too long suffering lyre;  
 Though to your love untiring still beholden,  
 The curfew tells me—cover up the fire.

And now with grateful smile and accents cheerful,  
 And warmer heart than look or word can tell,  
 In simplest phrase—these traitorous eyes are tearful—  
 Thanks, Brothers, Sisters,—Children,—and farewell!

And on his seventy-fifth birthday, in 1884, Lowell inscribed "To Holmes" some verses which may well serve for a final characterization of the poet and the man:

"Dear Wendell, why need count the years  
 Since first your genius made me thrill,  
 If what moved then to smiles or tears,  
 Or both contending, move me still?

"What has the Calendar to do  
 With poets? What Time's fruitless tooth  
 With gay immortals such as you  
 Whose years but emphasize your youth?

. . . . .

"Master alike in speech and song  
 Of fame's great antiseptic—Style,  
 You with the classic few belong  
 Who tempered wisdom with a smile.

"Outlive us all! Who else like you  
 Could sift the seedcorn from our chaff,  
 And make us with the pen we knew  
 Deathless at least in epitaph?"



**VIII**


**SIDNEY LANIER**



## SIDNEY LANIER


POETRY and Music have always been a wedded pair. Both are forms of imaginative expression, though poetry is the more intellectual, and music the more emotional. It is claimed by some that music is the original and fundamental reality. The word "Muse" seems to favor that contention. Certain it is that children and childlike peoples strive to put their feelings into melodic form, even before they can give them words. With growing maturity there comes more definite thought. Emotion becomes conscious. Ideas, in turn, blossom into song. "Maxwelton Braes Are Bonnie" and "The Marseillaise Hymn" are poetry so full of emotion that nothing but music can give it utterance. Music thus becomes the handmaid and helper of poetry. Rhythm and melody, however, react upon the thought that called them forth. The servant sometimes gives law to the master, and the rules of musical art stifle spontaneity of invention. If poetry is to be truly great, it must insist upon independence. Inspiration must make its own rules. The melodist must not impose his rhythm too inexorably upon the poet; while at the same time the poet must never lose sight of his need of musical expression. He may use discords, but it must always be with a view to a larger harmony.

Sidney Lanier was primarily a musician, and sec-



ondarily a poet. He is the only one of our American poets who was master of a musical instrument, and who also evolved a complete theory of the structure of poetry. While as a poet he had originality and depth of emotion, his musical tastes and thoughts tended to dominate his poetical composition, and to make it too rigid and mechanical. With great sensitiveness of organization he united an extraordinary and even a heroic devotion to principle. To be true to his convictions with regard to art and life, he was ready to make the greatest sacrifices. His history furnishes us with an illustration of conscious surrender to duty, both in the esthetic and in the moral realms. And yet, in his efforts to subject poetry to the trammels of a system, his musical instincts lorded it over his genius, and prevented his most complete poetical development. We must therefore call him our chief poetical musician rather than our chief musical poet.

The life of Lanier was brief and pathetic. Born in 1842, he died in 1881. But Keats lived to be only twenty-six, and Shelley to be only thirty, while Lanier died at thirty-nine. Poe died at forty. There are curious resemblances between Lanier and Poe, and even more instructive differences. They are our two Southern poets, both of them breathing the emotion and the passion of the South. But Poe's English schooling emancipated him completely from Southern ideals and traditions. In only one of his tales does he show any acquaintance with Negro character or dialect; and as for slavery, it is as if he had never known of its existence; he thought all reformers indeed to be madmen; he was as complete a cosmo-





politan as if he had always lived in Great Britain. Lanier, on the other hand, was in spirit bound up with the South; he practically gave his life to the Confederate cause; though misguided, he was a true patriot; some of his most effective poems are in the Negro dialect; he sympathized with many forms of labor and reform. Poe's conception of poetry was exclusively emotional; to him poetry was only music, designed to stir the feelings with the vague sense of beauty, but with no intent to influence the will. Lanier was equally an artist, but with truth at the basis of his art; he aimed to make beauty an inspiration to noble and heroic action; he said, "The trouble with Poe was, he did not know enough." In short, while Poe was a poetical melodist, Lanier was more; he was a poetical musician, whose intellectual apprehension of rhythm and number brought mere emotion into subjection, and made it the instrument of truth and duty.

Materials for the life of Lanier are not abundant. The memorial by William Hayes Ward prefixed to the standard edition of Lanier's "Poems," and the biography of Lanier by Edwin Mims in "American Men of Letters," are our best sources of information. The former, though succinct, is remarkably comprehensive and sympathetic. The latter fills in the outline with valuable details, drawn from Lanier's letters and the reports of his friends, while it adds much in the way of critical estimate. From both these sources we learn that our poet was the son of Robert S. Lanier, a reputable lawyer of Macon, Georgia, and of Mary J. Anderson, a Virginia lady of Scotch-Irish descent.

The father came of Huguenot ancestry, and on both sides of the family there were far back in the line both gentle blood and artistic gifts. Sidney, from a child, had a passion for music. He played all sorts of instruments—piano, organ, violin, guitar, banjo, flute—almost by instinct, and was often so carried away by harmony as to be lifted into a trancelike rapture. His father feared the influence of the violin upon him; its human quality was too engrossing; for it was substituted the flute, which the boy played with a spirituality of expression exceedingly unique and penetrating. In after days, as first flute in the Peabody Symphony Orchestra at Baltimore, he never lacked for support or admiration.

Lanier's flute and Lanier himself were so inseparable that they will go down into history, and we must give a moment to tracing the connection between them. The first instrument of the sort which he possessed was of his own manufacture. When he was only seven years old, he cut a reed from the river-bank, stopped its ends with cork, and dug six finger-holes in its sides. On this he would practise passionately, going into the woods to imitate bird-trills, and leading an orchestra of his playmates. All through his college days the flute was his recreation, and through his army life its companionship helped him to endure hardship and suffering. Natural facility, however, did not blind him to the need of technical skill. He made himself master of his art by unending study. His beautiful silver flute became a central point of interest in every concert. The director of the Peabody Orchestra writes of him:

"His playing appealed alike to the musically learned and to the unlearned—for he would magnetize the listener; but the artist felt in his performance the superiority of the momentary living inspiration to all the rules and shifts of mere technical scholarship. His art was not only the art of art, but an art above art. I will never forget the impression he made upon me when he played the flute concerto of Emil Hartmann at a Peabody Symphony concert in 1878,—his tall, handsome, manly presence; his flute breathing noble sorrows, noble joys; the orchestra softly responding. The audience was spell-bound. Such distinction, such refinement! He stood, the master, the genius!"

I have sketched thus briefly Lanier's musical development, not only because it enables us better to understand the peculiarities of his poetry, but also because it long preceded his recognition of poetry as the all-inclusive art, and his consequent determination to make it the object of his supreme devotion. It was not until he had reached the age of thirty-two that this change became complete. How gradual was the poetical development, can only be realized when we go back to his educational beginnings, and trace from those beginnings the growth of his mind and heart. In his father's house he had received the liberal culture which was furnished by a well-stocked library, and by traditions of Southern hospitality. Nearly six feet in height, and of dignified but winning manners, he was known by all as a typical Southern gentleman. When only fourteen he entered Oglethorpe College, and at eighteen he was graduated at the head of his class. After his graduation he was tutor in the college, and this position he held until the outbreak of our Civil War. With all his musical gifts, he shared the opinion of his parents that music

was not a worthy profession for life. Yet he felt that music was his chief endowment. The result was a struggle to learn the way of duty—a struggle which could be decided only by a larger knowledge of literature and of life. Not until fourteen years after, when poetry had risen before him as the highest work of human imagination, did he determine to give himself to poetry, and to make his musical gifts minister to a higher and broader poetical art.

His nature was religious, but he was conscious of genius, and he desired to make the most of his talents. When he was a college boy of eighteen, he wrote in a penciled note-book the following significant words:

The point which I wish to settle is merely, by what method shall I ascertain what I am fit for, as preliminary to ascertaining God's will with reference to me; or what my inclinations are, as preliminary to ascertaining what my capacities are, that is, what I am fit for. I am more than all perplexed by this fact, that the prime inclination, that is, natural bent (which I have checked, though) of my nature is to music; and for that I have the greatest talent; indeed, not boasting, for God gave it me, I have an extraordinary musical talent, and feel it within me plainly that I could rise as high as any composer. But I cannot bring myself to believe that I was intended for a musician, because it seems so small a business in comparison with other things which, it seems to me, I might do. Question here, What is the province of music in the economy of the world?

Here are great questions suggested. That they occurred to him thus early is proof of a thoughtful and serious mind. He never forgot the Calvinistic and Presbyterian training he had received in Macon, though exuberant spirits and wider knowledge modified his practice. Long afterward he wrote:

If the constituents and guardians of my childhood—those good Presbyterians who believed me a model for the Sunday-school children of all times—could have witnessed my acts and doings this day, I know not what groans of sorrowful regret would arise in my behalf.

But how intensely conscientious he was during his college life may be judged from a letter of penitence written to his father, when on one occasion he had broken his father's rule never to borrow money from a college mate:

My father, I have sinned. With what intensity of thought, with what deep and earnest reflection, have I contemplated this lately! My heart throbs with the intensity of its anguish. . . If by hard study and good conduct I can atone for that, God in heaven knows that I shall not be found wanting. . . Not a night passes but what the supplication, *God bless my parents*, ascends to the great mercy-seat.

It was an orthodox college which Lanier attended. But James Woodrow was its Professor of Science. He was a pupil of Agassiz, and he had studied in Germany. He maintained that science is a revelation from God, and he accepted the doctrine of evolution. For this he was ultimately tried and condemned by the Southern Presbyterian Church. He made Lanier a frequent companion, and after his graduation secured for him the tutorship. Woodrow never gave up his Christian faith, but rather held that science confirmed it. His influence on Lanier was powerful. It enabled our poet to realize that nature and art, genius and religion, are not powers hostile to each other, but that each represents an aspect of God's truth which must have its place and influence in

human life. He became an independent thinker, while at the same time he remained a genuinely religious man. The old conflict between musical taste and ethical demands was reconciled, since both had a divine origin. He learned the supremacy of reason over emotion, of thought over melody. He sought to reinforce his thought-life by science and literature, and so to fit himself for the largest possible service. He planned to study in Europe, as Longfellow had already done. Poetry was to be enriched by all his gifts of music, scholarship, and travel. We wonder what the result would have been if he had been permitted to carry out his plan. With sadness we must record, instead, a long period of arrested development. War had sounded his brazen trumpet, and Lanier's conscience bade him stand for the South.

The story of his valor and suffering in our Civil War is a thrilling though sorrowful one. He had the boyish love for military life. He had led mimic battalions of his schoolfellows. When Southern youth were summoned, as the proclamations ran, to defend their institutions against the despotism and fanaticism of the North, every college closed its doors and sent its students to the front. Lanier was only nineteen, a stripling, but a model of health and energy. With his brother Clifford, still younger than himself, he enlisted as a private in the Macon Volunteers, the first company that went to Virginia from Georgia. Three times, it is reported, he refused promotion, in order that he might be near his brother and care for him. During the first year, encamped near Norfolk, he saw the attractive side of army life, the pomp and

circumstance of war. The proximity of the prosperous city gave him congenial society. There was opportunity for reading and for music, and Lanier's flute made him in constant request. The daily drilling of raw recruits was followed by nightly dances and serenades. The second year of his service saw his company mounted as scouts on good horses, and patrolling the banks of the James. But war now began to reveal its horrors. Lanier was engaged in the battles of Seven Pines and of Drewry's Bluffs. He went through the seven days of fighting about Richmond, which culminated at Malvern Hill. Exposure gave him his first premonitions of consumption. But a two-weeks' visit on furlough to his home in Macon made life bright again, for there he met and became engaged to Miss Mary Day, whom four years afterward he married, and who proved to be the guardian angel of his life.

Both he and his brother served in the army for three years, but during the last of the three they were separated, though only that each might, as signal-officer, take charge of a blockade-runner which brought rebel supplies. On one of these expeditions, only fourteen hours after leaving harbor, he was captured, and for four months was confined in Point Lookout prison. His already weakened constitution never outgrew the shock of that imprisonment. To it he attributed the permanent loss of his health. In the biography by Mims, we are told that he secured his release through some gold which a friend of his had smuggled into the prison in his mouth. "He came out emaciated to a skeleton, downhearted for want

of news from home, downhearted for weariness." Mims quotes from Baskervill the story of his rescue from death, as told by the lady herself, who was the good Samaritan on this occasion:

"She was an old friend from Montgomery, Alabama, returning from New York to Richmond; and her little daughter, who had learned to call him Brother Sid, chanced to hear that he was down in the hold of the vessel dying. On application to the colonel in command, permission was promptly given her to minister to his necessity, and she made haste to go below. 'Now my friends in New York,' continued she, 'had given me a supply of medicines, for we had few such things in Dixie, and among the remedies were quinine and brandy. I hastily took a flask of brandy, and we went below, where we were led to the rude stalls provided for cattle, but now crowded with poor human wretches. There in that horrible place dear Sidney Lanier lay wrapt in an old quilt, his thin hands tightly clinched, his face drawn and pinched, his eyes fixed and staring, his poor body shivering now and then in a spasm of pain. Lilla fell at his side, kissing him and calling: 'Brother Sid, don't you know me? Don't you know your little sister?' But no recognition or response came from the sunken eyes. I poured some brandy into a spoon and gave it to him. It gurgled down his throat at first with no effort from him to swallow it. I repeated the stimulant several times before he finally revived. At last he turned his eyes slowly about until he saw Lilla, and murmured: 'Am I dead? Is this Lilla? Is this heaven?' . . . To make a long story short, the colonel assisted us to get him above to our cabin. I can see his fellow prisoners now as they crouched and assisted to pass him along over their heads, for they were so packed that they could not make room to carry him through. Along over their heads they tenderly passed the poor emaciated body, so shrunken with prison life and benumbed with cold. We got him into clean blankets, but at first he could not endure the pain from the fire, he was so nearly frozen. We gave him some hot soup and more brandy, and he lay quiet till after midnight. Then he asked for his flute and began playing. As he played the first few notes, you should



have heard the yell of joy that came up from the shivering wretches down below, who knew that their comrade was alive. And there we sat entranced about him, the colonel and his wife, Lilla and I, weeping at the tender music, as the tones of new warmth and color and hope came like liquid melody from his magic flute.'"

His release from Point Lookout occurred in February, 1865. Within a few weeks the Confederacy was at an end, and Lanier, with only his twenty-dollar gold-piece and his flute, walked all the way from Richmond to his home in Georgia. Six weeks of desperate illness followed, and not long after his recovery his beloved mother died of consumption. He was by turns a clerk and a schoolmaster for three years, and during these years he married. Then came his first hemorrhage, settled cough, and steady decline. 'But out of these troubled days he emerged with a new sense of his vocation. Though for several years he strove to make both ends meet, by studying and practising law with his father, it gradually dawned upon him that literature was his real calling. Indeed, when death most threatened him, he became most conscious of genius and most determined to fight for life. So early as 1864, in a letter to his father, he wrote:

Gradually I find that my whole soul is merging itself into this business of writing, and especially of writing poetry. I am going to try it; and am going to test, in the most rigid way I know, the awful question whether it is my vocation.

If this was his ambition in the very stress and strain of his war experiences, it is not wonderful that the law practice of a country attorney did not satisfy him. In 1873 he wrote from Texas to his wife:

Were it not for some circumstances which make such a proposition seem absurd in the highest degree, I should think that I am shortly to die, and that my spirit hath been singing its swan-song before dissolution. All day my soul hath been cutting swiftly into the great space of the subtle, unspeakable deep, driven by wind after wind of heavenly melody.

And in another letter to his wife he makes frank confession of his faith in himself and in his calling:

Know, then, that disappointments were inevitable, and will still come, until I have fought the battle which every great artist has had to fight since the world began. This—dimly felt while I was doubtful of my own vocation and powers—is clear to me as the sun, now that I *know*, through the fiercest tests of life, that I am in soul, and shall be in life and utterance, a great poet.

All this might seem but the dream of an overwrought imagination, if it were not for the religious faith in which it is grounded, and the humble sense of his dependence upon God. Let us read some later words of this same letter:

Now this is written because I sit here in my room daily, and picture *thee* picturing *me* worn, and troubled, or disheartened; and because I do not wish thee to think up any groundless sorrow in thy soul. Of course I have my keen sorrows, momentarily more keen than I would like any one to know; but I thank God that in a knowledge of Him and of myself which cometh to me daily in fresh revelations, I have a steadfast firmament of blue, in which all clouds soon dissolve.

The utter collapse of the Confederacy and the ruin of the South, added to his own ill health, gave a somber tone to his earliest poetry. He was naturally cheerful, yet there seemed to hang over his spirit the premonition of future sorrow. He refused to

print his first poems, for the very reason that their sadness of tone was not consistent with the highest art. In this he was the opposite of Poe, who welcomed and echoed the most doleful voices of humanity, provided they were moving and melodious. We find in Lanier's early works a sweetness and maturity which more than make up for their occasional mournfulness. His love-poems belong mostly to this period, and they are addressed to his wife. There is a daintiness of touch in his "Song for the Jacquerie," which gives promise of the future:

May the maiden,  
Violet-laden  
Out of the violet sea,  
Comes and hovers  
Over lovers,  
Over thee, Marie, and me,  
Over me and thee.

Day the stately,  
Sunken lately  
Into the violet sea,  
Backward hovers  
Over lovers,  
Over thee, Marie, and me,  
Over me and thee.

Night the holy,  
Sailing slowly  
Over the violet sea,  
Stars uncovers  
Over lovers,  
Stars for thee, Marie, and me,  
Stars for me and thee.

"My Springs," written long after, when struggle and sorrow had given new sacredness to their affection,

must be quoted to show how nobly ripened was the expression of that affection in his poetry:

In the heart of the Hills of Life, I know  
Two springs that with unbroken flow  
Forever pour their lucent streams  
Into my soul's far Lake of Dreams.

. . . . .

O Love, O Wife, thine eyes are they,  
—My springs from out whose shining gray  
Issue the sweet celestial streams  
That feed my life's bright Lake of Dreams.

. . . . .

Dear eyes, dear eyes and rare complete—  
Being heavenly-sweet and earthly-sweet,  
—I marvel that God made you mine,  
For when He frowns, 'tis then ye shine!

"The Jacquerie," the longest of his poems, is also one of his earliest. Its subject is the uprising of the French peasantry against feudal oppression in the middle of the fourteenth century. Lanier's readings of history in college drew his attention to this theme, and enlisted his sympathy with the poor and down-trodden. He sought to glorify in verse the advent of Trade, which first set limits to the domination of the nobles; and then sought equally to glorify the advent of Brotherhood, which now promises to restrict the aggressions of Trade. His plan was too large, and it required too much of learning, to reach completion. "The Jacquerie" always remained "A Fragment." But it contains some dignified and impressive stanzas, and it shows rare powers not yet under perfect control. Its opening lines are a poetical descrip-

tion of that great popular outbreak which began so hopefully, but which came to so speedy and so fearful an end:

Once on a time, a Dawn, all red and bright  
Leapt on the conquered ramparts of the Night,  
And flamed, one brilliant instant, on the world,  
Then back into the historic moat was hurled  
And Night was King again, for many years.  
—Once on a time the Rose of Spring blushed out  
But Winter angrily withdrew it back  
Into his rough new-bursten husk, and shut  
The stern husk-leaves, and hid it many years.

Even in this poem the dominant note is not that of sadness, but of joy. And in his whole poetic development the element of joy became more and more pronounced as he went on. His Calvinistic training was in a measure outgrown, but faith in a divine ordering of human life and destiny remained, the change being only in the new emphasis given to God's love. In the first poems, pain and death are more plain to view; in the last, He who conquered pain and death. In proof of this, let us set in juxtaposition two poems, one from the beginning of his career, and the other from the end. The first is "Resurrection":

Sometimes in morning sunlights by the river  
Where in the early fall long grasses wave,  
Light winds from over the moorland sink and shiver  
And sigh as if just blown across a grave.

And then I pause and listen to this sighing.  
I look with strange eyes on the well-known stream.  
I hear wild birth-cries uttered by the dying.  
I know men waking who appear to dream.

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Then from the water-lilies slow uprises  
The still vast face of all the life I know,  
Changed now, and full of wonders and surprises,  
With fire in eyes that once were glazed with snow.

. . . . .

For eighteen centuries ripple down the river,  
And windy times the stalks of empires wave,  
—Let the winds come from the moor and sigh and  
shiver,  
Fain, fain am I, O Christ, to pass the grave.

Here seems to be a vision of Him who is "the Resurrection and the Life," and who has brought "life and immortality to light." Compare with this the poem next to the last Lanier wrote—a poem, in our judgment inimitably expressing the method by which that "life and immortality" were won, namely, by our Lord's loving surrender to death, "for the joy that was set before Him." It is "A Ballad of Trees and the Master":

Into the woods my Master went,  
Clean forspent, forspent.  
Into the woods my Master came,  
Forspent with love and shame.  
But the olives they were not blind to Him,  
The little gray leaves were kind to Him:  
The thorn-tree had a mind to Him  
When into the woods He came.

Out of the woods my Master went,  
And He was well content.  
Out of the woods my Master came,  
Content with death and shame.  
When Death and Shame would woo Him last,  
From under the trees they drew Him last:  
'Twas on a tree they slew Him—last  
When out of the woods He came.

It was not until December, 1873, that Lanier obtained employment sufficiently steady to support his growing family and to permit any regular devotion to literary work. At that time his great musical talent secured for him a permanent position in the Peabody Symphony Orchestra of Baltimore. With this encouragement he felt that he must put forth every energy of his being to do his work while strength remained. Then began a heroic fight with death—a fight which lasted for eight long years, and in which the frail body at last succumbed. He was cheered by being appointed Lecturer on English Literature in the Peabody Institute in 1878, and in the Johns Hopkins University in 1879. But these encouragements came late, when he was greatly weakened. His lectures seemed like the struggles of an indomitable spirit to resist a tide that was bearing him to another shore. His courses on Shakespeare and on the English Novel were admired. They revealed rare powers of criticism and an unexpected wealth of learning. In truth, the access to great libraries and to cultivated society had stimulated him to omnivorous reading, and had given his faculties a wonderfully rapid growth. The world had come to believe in him as the rising poet of the South, and the atmosphere of praise, after long depression, was grateful and quickening.

It was his poem entitled "Corn" that first brought his poetry into public notice. After his first winter's work as musician in Baltimore he spent the summer near his old home. The waving fields of corn which alternated with deserted farms stirred the fountains of poetry within him. He saw in the multiplication

of homesteads, and the cultivation of the soil by free labor, the restoration of prosperity in the South. Manufactures had not yet impressed their claims upon him. The beauty of the woods and of all natural growths seemed to him God's appeal to man to till the soil. So in this poem we have the contrast between desolation and fertility, and the prophecy of harvests yet to come :

To-day the woods are trembling through and through  
 With shimmering forms, that flash before my view,  
 Then melt in green as dawn-stars melt in blue.  
     The leaves that wave against my cheek caress  
     Like women's hands; the embracing boughs express  
         A subtlety of mighty tenderness;  
     The copse-depths into little noises start,  
     That sound anon like beatings of a heart,  
     Anon like talk 'twixt lips not far apart.

He sees all this promise turned to naught by unthrift and avarice, yet believes in the better future which industry may insure :

Yet shall the great God turn thy fate,  
 And bring thee back into thy monarch state  
     And majesty immaculate.  
     Lo, through hot waverings of the August morn,  
     Thou givest from thy vasty sides forlorn  
     Visions of golden treasures of corn—  
 Ripe largesse lingering for some bolder heart  
 That manfully shall take thy part,  
     And tend thee,  
     And defend thee,  
 With antique sinew and with modern art.

The publication of " Corn " in " Lippincott's Magazine " made many friends for the poet. To one of these



friends, Mr. Peacock, he wrote, in 1875, of another poem, based upon the same idea that agriculture was the hope of the South—not the agriculture of great plantations, but of innumerable farms tilled by free-men. As in his earlier poem of " Jacquerie," with a still lingering prejudice against workmen and factories, he regards Trade as stifling individual development, and welcomes the new Brotherhood of labor. Of this new poem he writes:

I call it " The Symphony ": I personify each instrument in the orchestra, and make them discuss various deep social questions of the times, in the progress of the music. It is now nearly finished; and I shall be rejoiced thereat, for it verily racks all the bones of my spirit.

The program was a bold one; whether it was wise to make musical instruments actually speak, may well be doubted. The poet's skill in executing his scheme, however, was considerable, as may be seen from the following quotations:

" O Trade! O Trade! would thou wert dead!  
The Time needs heart—'tis tired of head:  
We're all for love," the violins said.

But presently

A velvet flute-note fell down pleasantly  
Upon the bosom of that harmony,  
And sailed and sailed incessantly,  
As if a petal from a wild-rose blown  
Had fluttered down upon that pool of tone.

Yea, Nature, singing sweet and lone,  
Breathes through life's strident polyphone  
The flute-voice in the world of tone.

Sweet friends,  
 Man's love ascends  
 To finer and diviner ends  
 Than man's mere thought e'er comprehends.

And then the hautboy played and smiled,  
 And sang like any large-eyed child,  
 Cool-hearted and all undefiled.  
 "Huge Trade!" he said,  
 "Would thou wouldst lift me on thy head  
 And run where'er my finger led!  
 Once said a Man—and wise was He—  
*Never shalt thou the heavens see,  
 Save us a little child thou be.*"

"And yet shall Love himself be heard,  
 Though long deferred, though long deferred:  
 O'er the modern waste a dove hath whirred:  
 Music is Love in search of a word."

This poem, when published in "Lippincott's Magazine," won the praise of Bayard Taylor, and led, through his recommendation, to the choice of Lanier to compose the Cantata for the Opening of the Centennial World's Fair at Philadelphia, in 1876. Our poet merited his appointment, for he represented the reconstructed South, and the new consciousness of our national unity. The days of bitterness had passed; slavery was no more; let the blue and the gray clasp hands and vow fidelity to the Union. It was a large task to put all this into song. Lanier's conception of his work was that of Pindar's Odes. His Cantata was not a poem, to be read; it was a song, to be sung, and sung by a thousand voices, with majestic orchestral accompaniment. Judged simply as a poem, it seems flighty and hysterical. It was received by

the press with ridicule. But when actually rendered, it proved to be the one and only part of the program that completely held the attention and won the applause of the vast audience. We cannot deny the startling energy and poetic insight of the following passages:

From this hundred-terraced height,  
Sight more large with nobler light  
Ranges down yon towering years.  
Humbler smiles and lordlier tears  
Shine and fall, shine and fall,  
While old voices rise and call  
Yonder where the to-and-fro  
Weltering of my Long-Ago  
Moves about the moveless base  
Far below my resting-place.

This opening stanza is accompanied by the following Musical Annotations: "Full chorus, sober, measured and yet majestic progressions of chords." Then comes a second "Chorus: the sea and the winds mingling their voices with human sighs":

Mayflower, Mayflower, slowly hither flying,  
Trembling westward o'er yon balking sea,  
Hearts within *Farewell dear England* sighing,  
Winds without *But dear in vain* replying,  
Gray-lipp'd waves about thee shouted, crying  
"No! It shall not be!"

After a musical representation of the famine and savagery of Jamestown, and an allusion to the "wild brother-wars" from which our country had just emerged, comes a "Chorus of jubilation":

Now Praise to God's oft-granted grace,  
Now Praise to man's undaunted face,  
Despite the land, despite the sea,



I was: I am: and I shall be—  
How long, Good Angel, O how long?  
Sing me from Heaven a man's own song!

And in a "basso solo" the Good Angel replies to this importunity:

"Long as thine Art shall love true love,  
Long as thy Science truth shall know,  
Long as thine Eagle harms no Dove,  
Long as thy Law by law shall grow,  
Long as thy God is God above,  
Thy brother every man below,  
So long, dear Land of all my love,  
Thy name shall shine, thy fame shall glow!"

Our national Centennial fairly launched our poet in his literary career. Music now became the servant of poetry. He had won his way to public notice. He had given promise of great achievements. While success made him more sure of his vocation, it also gave him a new sense of his defects as a writer. So early as 1864, indeed, he had written to his father:

I have frequently noticed in myself a tendency to a diffuse style; a disposition to push my metaphors too far, employing a multitude of words to heighten the patness of the image, and so making of it a *conceit* rather than a metaphor, a fault copiously illustrated in the poetry of Cowley, Waller, Donne, and others of that ilk.

Twelve years had passed since then, and the defects still remained; indeed, they were never fully corrected, and to some extent they mar even his best work. But he now had new encouragement and new determination to remedy them. He strove diligently to perfect his style. How great the strain of the effort was can

be appreciated only when we remember that he was handicapped by a gnawing and fatal disease, and by the devotion of a large part of his time to the rehearsals and concerts of the orchestra. The deep inspirations of his flute-playing did something to prolong his life, but the meagerness of its financial returns almost counterbalanced this advantage. Only during the last two years of his life was he sufficiently free from monetary cares to devote himself exclusively to literature. He deserved all the more credit for the progress which he made. His poem "Psalm of the West" is vague and prolix, though it is lit up by two stanzas referring to our Civil War, in which the contestants are pictured as two knights in a medieval tournament:

"They charged, they struck; both fell, both bled;  
Brain rose again, ungloved;  
Heart fainting smiled, and softly said,  
*My love to my Beloved.*"

Heart and Brain! no more be twain;  
Throb and think, one flesh again!  
Lo! they weep, they turn, they run;  
Lo! they kiss: Love, thou art one!

"The Marshes of Glynn" is often called Lanier's best production. It is spontaneous and simple, while at the same time it is mature and profound. The poet enters into the life of Nature, and in that life finds another life revealed, even the life of God. As the tide comes in, he seems to himself possessed of new purity and freedom, because he can put his weakness and sin into the care of limitless mercy and love:

A league and a league of marsh-grass, waist-high, broad in  
 the blade,  
 Green, and all of a height, and unflecked with a light or a  
 shade,  
 Stretch leisurely off, in a pleasant plain,  
 To the terminal blue of the main.

Oh, what is abroad in the marsh and the terminal sea?  
 Somehow my soul seems suddenly free  
 From the weighing of fate and the sad discussion of sin,  
 By the length and the breadth and the sweep of the marshes  
 of Glynn.

Ye marshes, how candid and simple and nothing-withholding  
 and free  
 Ye publish yourselves to the sky and offer yourselves to the  
 sea!  
 Tolerant plains, that suffer the sea and the rains and the sun,  
 Ye spread and span like the catholic man who hath mightily  
 won  
 God out of knowledge and good out of infinite pain  
 And sight out of blindness and purity out of a stain.

As the marsh-hen secretly builds on the watery sod,  
 Behold I will build me a nest on the greatness of God:  
 I will fly in the greatness of God as the marsh-hen flies  
 In the freedom that fills all the space 'twixt the marsh and the  
 skies:  
 By so many roots as the marsh-grass sends in the sod  
 I will heartily lay me a-hold on the greatness of God:  
 Oh, like to the greatness of God is the greatness within  
 The range of the marshes, the liberal marshes of Glynn.

Here is not only insight into the meaning of Nature  
 which would do credit to Wordsworth, but also a  
 mastery of form which would do credit to Shelley.  
 The " Psalm of the West " seems to have been out-  
 grown, and a larger vision of truth to have been  
 gained. Lanier's lectures at Johns Hopkins Univer-

sity confirm our impression that the last years were years of moral and religious as well as of intellectual and esthetic progress. He believed in a moral selfhood which was no mere product of Nature, but which dominated Nature instead, and this faith he expressed in his poem entitled “ Individuality ”:

*What the cloud doeth  
The Lord knoweth,  
The cloud knoweth not.  
What the artist doeth,  
The Lord knoweth;  
Knoweth the artist not?*

Well-answered!—O dear artists, ye  
—Whether in forms of curve or hue  
Or tone your gospels be—  
Say wrong *This work is not of me,*  
*But God:* it is not true, it is not true.

Awful is Art because 'tis free.  
The artist trembles o'er his plan  
Where men his Self must see.  
Who made a song or picture, he  
Did it, and not another, God nor man.

My Lord is large, my Lord is strong:  
Giving, He gave: my me is mine.  
How poor, how strange, how wrong,  
To dream He wrote the little song  
I made to Him with love's unforced design!

We fortunately have Lanier's own interpretation of this poem. The enormous generalizations of modern science had filled him with dreams like those of his boyhood. In a letter to a friend he writes:

It is precisely at the beginning of that phenomenon which is the underlying subject of this poem, “ Individuality,” that the

largest of such generalizations must begin; and the doctrine of evolution when pushed beyond this point appears to me, after the most careful examination of the evidence, to fail. It is pushed beyond this point in its current application to the genesis of species; and I think Mr. Huxley's last sweeping declaration is clearly parallel to that of an enthusiastic dissector who, forgetting that his observations are upon dead bodies, should build a physiological conclusion upon purely anatomical facts. For whatever can be proved to have been evolved, evolution seems to me a noble and beautiful and true theory. But a careful search has not shown me a single instance in which such proof as would stand the first shot of a boy lawyer in a moot-court, has been brought forward in support of an actual case of species-differentiation. A cloud (see the poem) *may* be evolved; but not an artist; and I find, in looking over my poem, that it has made itself into a passionate reaffirmation of the artist's autonomy, threatened alike from the direction of the scientific fanatic and the pantheistic devotee.

So human individuality, with its correlates of conscience and will, enables us to interpret the poetic merging of man in God which we find in "The Marshes of Glynn." In God we "live and move and have our being"; but it is nevertheless true that we are still free and responsible creatures.

William Hayes Ward has done us great service by pointing out that, like Milton and Ruskin, Lanier was dominated by the beauty of holiness. He loved indeed to reverse the phrase, and to speak also of "the holiness of beauty." But a high moral spirit informed all his art. In one of his lectures to the students of Johns Hopkins University he declared true beauty and true holiness to be one:

Let any sculptor hew us out the most ravishing combination of tender curves and spheric softness that ever stood for woman; yet if the lip have a certain fulness that hints of the



flesh, if the brow be insincere, if in the minutest particular the physical beauty suggest a moral ugliness, that sculptor—unless he be portraying a moral ugliness for a moral purpose—may as well give over his marble for paving-stones. Time, whose judgments are inexorably moral, will not accept his work. For, indeed, we may say that he who has not yet perceived how artistic beauty and moral beauty are convergent lines which run back into a common ideal origin, and who therefore is not afire with moral beauty just as with artistic beauty—that he, in short, who has not come to that stage of quiet and eternal frenzy in which the beauty of holiness and the holiness of beauty mean one thing, burn as one fire, shine as one light within him—he is not yet the great artist.

This is an utterance worthy to be written in letters of gold and posted upon the walls of every studio of art. It shows that Lanier was finding in his own work a moral development and education. He wished to subject his own art to eternal principles, and to make a conscience of poetry. In no other way can I understand the long thought and labor which he gave to the composition of his "Science of English Verse." He would master the theory, before he ventured further upon practice. That volume is proof of his wide reading, but also of his philosophical acuteness. Whether we accept its conclusions or not, we must acknowledge the keen insight and the judicial spirit with which it is written.

Lanier's "Science of English Verse" is an effort to interpret the forms of poetry in terms of music. He would substitute time-measurement in place of stress-measurement. Poe had maintained that accent makes a syllable always *long*. Lanier's musical instinct rejected this doctrine, and while, like Poe, he insisted on melody as indispensable to poetry, he held that

this melody is the product of rhythm, tone, and color, rather than of mere stress of sound. He began in "Special Pleading" to work out his theory. We must acknowledge that this poem hardly justifies his contention. Its compound substantives, "now-time," "lonesome - tree," "star - consummate," "rose - complete," "dusk-time," "noon-time," seem made to order, and to have in them little of poetic beauty. The rhythm itself sounds broken and unmusical, and the thought is not of sufficient value to make up for a certain ambitious thrusting into notice of the merely formal element of the verse:

Time, hurry my Love to me:  
Haste, haste! Lov'st not good company?  
Here's but a heart-break sandy waste  
'Twixt Now and Then. Why, killing haste  
Were best, dear Time, for thee, for thee!

. . . . .

Sweet Sometime, fly fast to me:  
Poor Now-time sits in the Lonesome-tree  
And broods as gray as any dove,  
And calls, *When wilt thou come, O Love?*  
And pleads across the waste to thee.

. . . . .

Well, be it dusk-time or noon-time,  
I ask but one small boon, Time:  
Come thou in night, come thou in day,  
I care not, I care not: have thine own way,  
But only, but only, come soon, Time.

While Lanier sought to rescue poetry from the lawlessness of mere accent, he ran the risk of enslaving it to mere rhythm. Shakespeare is greatest of poets, in large part, because he unites the most delicate sense

of time-measurement with the greatest freedom of accent. In his later work, indeed, there is the most of spontaneity, with the least of mere mechanism. The rule for the tyro ceases to bind the master. Lanier's music too much dominated his poetry. "Sunrise," for example, while noble in conception, is exceedingly faulty in execution. The effort after form leads to display of words with little meaning. "The Science of English Verse" is a useful manual for the beginner, but it presents only one side of the truth, and it needs to be supplemented by considerations drawn from the realm of the ideal, rather than from the realm of musical notation.

Our poet's conscientiousness appeared more and more clearly as his days drew near to their end. His sense of duty was grounded in religion. While in Oglethorpe College he had professed his Christian faith, and had united with the Presbyterian Church. In his college note-book he wrote:

Liberty, patriotism, and civilization are on their knees before the men of the South, and with clasped hands and straining eyes are begging them to become Christians.

This Christian faith he never disowned. He learned to criticize the forms of religion, as he criticized the forms of poetry, without ever giving up their spirit. We find him in his later life skeptical with regard to churches and denominations and creeds, while yet he clung to his old beliefs with regard to sin and Christ and salvation. The external gave way to the internal. There was less and less of dependence upon self and upon human aid, but more and more dependence upon

the infinite pity and love of God, as they are made known to us in Jesus Christ. He did not express his faith in any dogmatic way, but this theology is implicit in his poems, as I shall proceed to illustrate. Let me begin with his poem entitled " Remonstrance " :

" Opinion, let me alone: I am not thine.  
 Prim Creed, with categoric point, forbear  
 To feature me my Lord by rule and line.  
 Thou canst not measure Mistress Nature's hair,  
 Not one sweet inch: nay, if thy sight is sharp,  
 Would'st count the strings upon an angel's harp?  
 Forbear, forbear.

" Oh let me love my Lord more fathom deep  
 Than there is line to sound with: let me love  
 My fellow not as men that mandates keep:  
 Yea, all that's lovable, below, above,  
 That let me love by heart, by heart, because  
 (Free from the penal pressure of the laws)  
 I find it fair.

. . . . .

" I would thou left'st me free, to live with love,  
 And faith, that through the love of love doth find  
 My Lord's dear presence in the stars above,  
 The clods below, the flesh without, the mind  
 Within, the bread, the tear, the smile.  
 Opinion, damned Intriguer, gray with guile,  
 Let me alone."

In " A Florida Sunday " he recognizes the grain of truth in pantheism, while he asserts just as clearly the independence and responsibility of each human soul :

All riches, goods and braveries never told  
 Of earth, sun, air and heaven—now I hold  
 Your being in my being; I am ye,  
 And ye myself; yea, lastly, Thee,

God, whom my roads all reach, howe'er they run,  
My Father, Friend, Belovèd, dear All-One,  
Thee in my soul, my soul in Thee, I feel,  
Self of my self. . .

. . . . .  
And I am one with all the kinsmen things  
That e'er my Father fathered. Oh, to me  
All questions solve in this tranquillity;  
E'en this dark matter, once so dim, so drear,  
Now shines upon my spirit heavenly-clear:  
Thou, Father, without logic, tellest me  
How this divine denial true may be,  
—How *All's in each, yet every one of all*  
*Maintains his Self complete and several.*

The problem of sin at times perplexed our poet, as it has perplexed every thoughtful soul since the world began. How can a holy and omnipotent God permit moral evil? The only answer is: It is the condition of the highest virtue that man should be free; and freedom to choose the good implies also freedom to choose the evil. Only faith in God's perfect love enables us to face the problem calmly, and still to believe that in the end God will justify his ways to men. In his poem, "Acknowledgment," Lanier has grappled with the problem, and has given the true solution:

If I do ask, How God can dumbness keep  
While Sin creeps grinning through His house of Time,  
Stabbing His saintliest children in their sleep,  
And staining holy walls with clots of crime?—  
Or, How may He whose wish but names a fact  
Refuse what miser's-scanting of supply  
Would richly glut each void where man hath lacked  
Of grace or bread?—or, How may Power deny  
Wholeness to th' almost-folk that hurt our hope—  
These heart-break Hamlets who so barely fail

In life or art that but a hair's more scope  
 Had set them fair on heights they ne'er may scale?—  
 Somehow by thee, dear Love, I win content:  
 Thy Perfect stops th' Imperfect's argument.

. . . . .

Not hardest Fortune's most unbounded stress  
 Can blind my soul nor hurl it from on high,  
 Possessing thee, the self of loftiness,  
 And very light that Light discovers by.  
 Howe'er thou turn'st, wrong Earth! still Love's in sight:  
 For we are taller than the breadth of night.

And in "Clover" he adds the needful injunction:

"Tease not thy vision with vain search for ends.  
 The End of Means is art that works by love.  
 The End of Ends . . . in God's Beginning's lost."

Some of these utterances are enigmatical. It is quite possible that the poet himself had not reached entire clearness of thought, and that his verse simply reflects his own dimness of vision. Yet the drift is plain. He trusts an overruling Wisdom, even though that Wisdom is for the present inscrutable to us. Some at least of God's dealings, untoward at first sight, have ultimate value and meaning. Lanier's poem "Opposition" teaches us to trust, where we cannot fully understand:

Of fret, of dark, of thorn, of chill,  
 Complain no more; for these, O heart,  
 Direct the random of the will  
 As rhymes direct the rage of art.

. . . . .

Of fret, of dark, of thorn, of chill,  
 Complain thou not, O heart; for these  
 Bank-in the current of the will  
 To uses, arts, and charities.

In "Rose-Morals" the poet seems to teach that the only refuge of the afflicted soul is found in that prayerfulness which links our work and our fate with the will of the Eternal:

Soul, get thee to the heart  
Of yonder tuberoses: hide thee there—  
There breathe the meditations of thine art  
Suffused with prayer.

Of spirit grave yet light,  
How fervent fragrances arise  
Pure-born from these most rich and yet most white  
Virginities!

Mulched with unsavory death,  
Grow, Soul! unto such white estate,  
That virginal-prayerful art shall be thy breath,  
Thy work, thy fate.

It is cheering and even thrilling to see how this heroic soul, with the clouds of failure and death lowering about him, still perceived Love ruling in the universe, and making all things work together for good. "How Love Looked for Hell" is a declaration that even penal suffering is referable to eternal Goodness:

"To heal his heart of long-time pain  
One day Prince Love for to travel was fain  
With Ministers Mind and Sense.  
'Now what to thee most strange may be?'  
Quoth Mind and Sense. 'All things above,  
One curious thing I first would see—  
Hell,' quoth Love.

. . . . .

"There, while they stood in a green wood  
And marvelled still on Ill and Good,  
Came suddenly Minister Mind.

'In the heart of sin doth hell begin:  
'Tis not below, 'Tis not above,  
It lieth within, it lieth within':  
( 'Where?' quoth Love?)

" 'I saw a man sit by a corse;  
*Hell's in the murderer's breast: remorse!*  
Thus clamored his mind to his mind:  
Not fleshly dole is the sinner's goal,  
Hell's not below, nor yet above,  
'Tis fixed in the ever-damnèd soul'—  
'Fixed?' quoth Love—

. . . . .

" 'In dreams, again, I plucked a flower  
That clung with pain and stung with power,  
Yea, nettled me, body and mind.'  
' 'Twas the nettle of sin, 'twas medicine;  
No need nor seed of it here Above;  
In dreams of hate true loves begin.'  
'True,' quoth Love.

" 'Now strange,' quoth Sense, and 'Strange' quoth  
Mind,  
'We saw it, and yet 'tis hard to find,  
—But we saw it,' quoth Sense and Mind.  
'Stretched on the ground, beautiful-crowned  
Of the piteous willow that wreathed above,  
But I cannot find where ye have found  
Hell,' quoth Love."

But here Lanier in part misses the truth. He sees that Hell begins in the heart of Sin, and that Remorse is Hell. But he makes Remorse to be Repentance, and Sin to furnish its own medicine, so that in the very act of penal suffering Hell is made to vanish away. The obduracy of an evil will is not taken account of. It is not Mind and Sense alone that demand punishment for persistent iniquity. Conscience and Reason



also echo the words of Holy Writ: "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." Dante's inscription over the gate of the Inferno is more true than Lanier's verse:

"Justice incited my sublime Creator;  
Created me divine Omnipotence,  
The highest Wisdom and the Primal Love."

He had little to look forward to in this world: he yearned all the more for a world to come. Rarely do we find in literature so strong a faith in immortality. His struggle with disease had gone on for three whole years when he wrote to his wife this "Evening Song":

Look off, dear Love, across the sallow sands,  
And mark yon meeting of the sun and sea,  
How long they kiss in sight of all the lands.  
Ah! longer, longer, we.

Now in the sea's red vintage melts the sun,  
As Egypt's pearl dissolved in rosy wine,  
And Cleopatra night drinks all. 'Tis done,  
Love, lay thine hand in mine.

Come forth, sweet stars, and comfort heaven's heart;  
Glimmer, ye waves, round else unlighted sands.  
O night! divorce our sun and sky apart;  
Never our lips, our hands.

And death to him is only new and perfect converse with the elect spirits of all time. It is the drinking of "The Stirrup-Cup" whose wine will be better than any fabled nectar of the gods:

Death, thou'rt a cordial old and rare:  
Look how compounded, with what care!  
Time got his wrinkles reaping thee  
Sweet herbs from all antiquity.

David to thy distillage went,  
 Keats, and Gotama excellent,  
 Omar Khayyam, and Chaucer bright,  
 And Shakspeare for a king-delight.

Then, Time, let not a drop be spilt:  
 Hand me the cup whene'er thou wilt;  
 'Tis thy rich stirrup-cup to me;  
 I'll drink it down right smilingly.

He has no fear for his work. The song which God has inspired, God will preserve. "A Song of the Future" seems to express this hope, trembling, yet confident:

Sail fast, sail fast,  
 Ark of my hopes, Ark of my dreams;  
 Sweep lordly o'er the drownèd Past,  
 Fly glittering through the sun's strange beams;  
 Sail fast, sail fast.  
 Breaths of new buds from off some drying lea  
 With news about the Future scent the sea:  
 My brain is beating like the heart of Haste:  
 I'll loose me a bird upon this Present waste;  
 Go, trembling song,  
 And stay not long; oh, stay not long:  
 Thou'rt only a gray and sober dove,  
 But thine eye is faith and thy wing is love.

"Sunrise" is Lanier's last poem, dictated when he was too weak to write. Its singularities show the lack of revision; yet, with much that is below the level of his best, there are bursts of true poetry which merit our praise. The rise of the sun over the marshes, and the flooding of the world with his light, symbolize to the poet the lifting up of his frailty into the infinite life of God:

Thou chemist of storms, whether driving the winds a-swirl  
 Or a-flicker the subtiler essences polar that whirl  
 In the magnet earth,—yea, thou with a storm for a heart,  
 Rent with debate, many-spotted with question, part  
 From part oft sundered, yet ever a globéd light,  
 Yet ever the artist, ever more large and bright  
 Than the eye of man may avail of:—manifold One,  
 I must pass from thy face, I must pass from the face of the  
 Sun:

Old Want is awake and agog, every wrinkle a-frown;  
 The worker must pass to his work in the terrible town:  
 But I fear not, nay, and I fear not the thing to be done;  
 I am strong with the strength of my lord the Sun:  
 How dark, how dark soever the race that must needs be run,  
 I am lit with the Sun.

. . . . .

And ever my heart through the night shall with knowledge  
 abide thee,  
 And ever by day shall my spirit, as one that hath tried thee,  
 Labor, at leisure, in art,—till yonder beside thee  
 My soul shall float, friend Sun,  
 The day being done.

Lanier's greatest poem, to our mind, is “ The Crystal.” It is his gréatest because it combines the most of critical judgment with the clearest confession of his faith in Christ. He gives us estimates of the world's greatest teachers, estimates so mature and convincing as to show that he might have made his mark in literary criticism. I can select only a few names of those whom he has described, but they will demonstrate the justice of his thought as well as the incisiveness of its expression. Only the imagination of a poet could so seize upon the central characteristic of its subject and set it forth so luminously. Let us instance Buddha :

So, Buddha, beautiful! I pardon thee  
 That all the All thou hadst for needy man  
 Was Nothing, and thy Best of being was  
 But not to be.

Worn Dante, I forgive  
 The implacable hates that in thy horrid hells  
 Or burn or freeze thy fellows, never loosed  
 By death, nor time, nor love.

And I forgive  
 Thee, Milton, those thy comic-dreadful wars  
 Where, armed with gross and inconclusive steel,  
 Immortals smite immortals mortalwise  
 And fill all heaven with folly.

Also thee,  
 Brave Æschylus, thee I forgive, for that  
 Thine eye, by bare bright justice basilisk'd,  
 Turned not, nor ever learned to look where Love  
 Stands shining.

So, unto thee, Lucretius mine  
 (For oh, what heart hath loved thee like to this  
 That's now complaining?), freely I forgive  
 Thy logic poor, thine error rich, thine earth  
 Whose graves eat souls and all.

So pass in review Marcus Aurelius, Thomas à Kempis,  
 Epictetus, Behmen, Swedenborg. Langley, Cædmon,  
 all pictured in single sentences, but with master-strokes  
 that open to us the very life. Coming down to our  
 own day we have

Emerson,  
 Most wise, that yet, in finding Wisdom, lost  
 Thy Self, sometimes; tense Keats, with angels' nerves,  
 Where men's were better; Tennyson, largest voice  
 Since Milton, yet some register of wit  
 Wanting:—all, all, I pardon, ere 'tis asked,  
 Your more or less, your little mole that marks  
 You brother and your kinship seals to man.

And finally, in contrast to all these human teachers, Lanier presents to us his picture of Him who is the Teacher of all true teachers, even as He is the King of kings and the Lord of lords:

But Thee, but Thee, O sovereign Seer of time,  
But Thee, O poets' Poet, Wisdom's Tongue,  
But Thee, O man's best Man, O love's best Love,  
O perfect life in perfect labor writ,  
O all men's Comrade, Servant, King, or Priest,—  
What *if* or *yet*, what mole, what flaw, what lapse,  
What least defect or shadow of defect,  
What rumor, tattled by an enemy,  
Of inference loose, what lack of grace  
Even in torture's grasp, or sleep's, or death's,—  
Oh, what amiss may I forgive in Thee,  
Jesus, good Paragon, thou Crystal Christ?

In all the great writers and great men of history he could find flaws which needed forgiveness. But Christ is so free from fault, so crystal-clear, that God's rays of truth and love can shine through him without hindrance. This perfect transparency to the divine proves him to be himself divine, our proper and only Prophet, Priest, and King. This seems to be the substance of Lanier's theology. We could wish that he went further, and saw as clearly that the universal need of forgiveness implies a holiness in God which makes forgiveness difficult; so difficult indeed that only Christ's suffering on account of sin renders it consistent that God should forgive. Our poet believed in God's holiness, for his own conscience reflected it. He believed also that sin brings suffering to the holy God as well as to the guilty transgressor. If he had put together the two facts of God's holiness and God's love, he

would have seen that Christ's Cross is the only solution of the problem how God can forgive sin; for, in that Cross, are manifested God's holiness necessitating suffering, and God's love enduring suffering, for men's salvation.

Though his faith in God's holiness did not lead him to its proper logical conclusion, it did lead him to try all art by the highest and severest of tests. He was no believer in "art for art's sake." Art has a nobler mission—the revelation of divine purity and love. He could criticize Whitman, Swinburne, and Morris, not only, for their lapses from that ideal standard; even Shakespeare is subjected to condemnatory judgment for his occasionally "labored-lewd discourse"; Homer too, for his "too soiled a patch to broider with the gods"; and even Socrates, for his "words of truth that, mildlier spoke, had manlier wrought." Yet he was a great lover of great men, and specially of family, friends, and institutions that had sympathized with him and helped him. We have seen how he loved his wife, revered his father, cared for his brother. He celebrates Charlotte Cushman, as "Art's artist, Love's dear woman, Fame's good queen"; Bayard Taylor, as mingling now with Plato and the bards of ancient and of modern times; and Dr. Thomas Shearer, on his presenting a portrait-bust of the author:

Since you, rare friend! have tied my living tongue  
With thanks more large than man e'er said or sung.  
So let the dumbness of this image be  
My eloquence, and still interpret me.

To his class, on certain fruits and flowers sent him in sickness, he writes:

If these the products be of love and pain,  
Oft may I suffer, and you love, again.

But to Johns Hopkins University, that had first given its academic recognition to his merit, and had made him one of its honored instructors, he pours forth a noble tribute of gratitude in his “Ode,” read on the fourth Commemoration Day, February, 1880:

How tall among her sisters, and how fair,—  
How grave beyond her youth, yet debonair  
As dawn, 'mid wrinkled *Matres* of old lands  
Our youngest *Alma Mater* modest stands!

And he calls upon the new university to inaugurate a reign of culture in our western world:

Bring old Renown  
To walk familiar citizen of the town,—  
Bring Tolerance, that can kiss and disagree,—  
Bring Virtue, Honor, Truth, and Loyalty,—  
Bring Faith that sees with undissembling eyes,—  
Bring all large Loves and heavenly Charities,—  
Till man seem less a riddle unto man  
And fair Utopia less Utopian,  
And many peoples call from shore to shore,  
*The world has bloomed again, at Baltimore!*

Lanier's poem “To Richard Wagner” expresses his own ambition to interpret our modern world by the music of poetry:

“O Wagner, westward bring thy heavenly art,  
No trifter thou: Siegfried and Wotan be  
Names for big ballads of the modern heart.  
Thine ears hear deeper than thine eyes can see.  
Voice of the monstrous mill, the shouting mart,  
Not less of airy cloud and wave and tree,  
Thou, thou, if even to thyself unknown,  
Hast power to say the Time in terms of tone.”

His verses " To Beethoven " celebrate the dignity of music, in the person of the great composer :

In o'er-strict calyx lingering,  
Lay music's bud too long unblown,  
Till thou, Beethoven, breathed the spring:  
Then bloomed the perfect rose of tone.

. . . . .

O Psalmist of the weak, the strong,  
O Troubadour of love and strife,  
Co-Litanist of right and wrong,  
Sole Hymner of the whole of life,

I know not how, I care not why,  
Thy music brings this broil at ease,  
And melts my passion's mortal cry  
In satisfying symphonies.

Yea, it forgives me all my sins,  
Fits life to love like rhyme to rhyme,  
And tunes the task each day begins  
By the last trumpet-note of Time.

Lanier was an optimist, not that he believed all things to be good, but that he believed all things work together for good, under the government of a holy and loving God. He believed in Christ, as the divine Governor, in nature and in history. In " Tiger-Lilies " he wrote :

Here, one's soul may climb as upon Pisgah, and see one's land  
Of peace, seeing Christ, who made all these beautiful things.

In other words, it is Christ who has created all things, and in whom all things consist, or hold together. This enables us to understand what otherwise might be thought a mere poetical fancy, I mean his attributing prayer even to the trees of the forest :



The trees that ever lifted their arms toward heaven, obeying the injunction of the Apostle, *praying always*,—the great uncomplaining trees, whose life is surely the finest of all lives, since it is nothing but a continual growing and being beautiful.

And in his lectures on Shakespeare at Johns Hopkins University he adds an instructive comment on the uses of Nature:

To him who rightly understands Nature, she is more than Ariel and Ceres to Prospero; she is more than a servant conquered like Caliban, to fetch wood for us: she is a friend and comforter; and to that man the cares of the world are but a fabulous *Midsummer Night's Dream*, to smile at—he is ever in sight of the morning and in hand-reach of God.

All this interprets to us his conception of his own vocation, together with its central importance and dignity:

It is the poet who must sit at the centre of things here, as surely as some great One sits at the centre of things Yonder, and who must teach us how to control, with temperance and perfect art and unforgetfulness of detail, all our oppositions, so that we may come to say with Aristotle, at last, that poetry is more philosophical than philosophy and more historical than history.

In the biography of Lanier by Mims, the most suggestive and valuable paragraph, from our point of view, is that one in which is described our poet's conception of the meaning and use of music, and I venture to quote the whole of it, as indicating the place he must occupy in the history of art:

"Lanier believed in the religious value of music; it was a 'gospel' whereof the people are in great need,—a later revela-

tion of all gospels in one'; 'music,' he says, 'is to be the Church of the future, wherein all creeds will unite like the tones in a chord.' He was one of 'those fervent souls who fare easily by this road to the Lord.' Haydn's inscription, '*Lowi Deo*,' was in Lanier's mind whenever he listened to great music; for it tended to 'help the emotions of man across the immensity of the known into the boundaries of the Unknown.' He would have composers to be ministers of religion. He could not understand the indifference of some leaders of orchestras, who could be satisfied with appealing to the æsthetic emotions of an audience, while they might 'set the hearts of fifteen hundred people afire.' The final meaning of music to him was that it created within man 'a great, pure, unanalyzable yearning after God.'"

It is not too much to say that Lanier regarded himself as the apostle of a new era, in which poetry should have music as its continual ministrant and helper. For this reason he cultivated not only his musical gifts, but also all his gifts of mind and heart. He sought to apply the scientific method to the study of poetry, and he conceived that he had improved the art by his discovery that rhythm, tone, and color, and not mere stress, are its essentials. He probably erred in thinking the science of versification more important than it is in reality. But he made up for this error by his constant insistence upon the moral significance of poetry, and by his subjection of all art to the final standard of God's purity and love. Being himself a great musician, he overrated music, and made it too dominant an element in his own compositions. We cannot doubt that some great poetry, like that of Wordsworth, is deficient in musical quality. Unrhythmical enunciation of important thought has sometimes all the effect, and even more than the effect, of

the most melodious and measured utterance. To Lanier's contention that the basis of rhythm is time, not accent, we would modestly reply that the basis of rhythm is both time and accent; the former giving us the form, the latter giving us the substance, of poetry. Which of the two, form or substance, is most important, is like the question which blade of the shears does the cutting. No poetry is great which is not a combination of the two; for the one is soul, the other is body; and though soul is the primary and dominant element, it will never make itself known to men except through the body which manifests it.

We are reminded again of the contrast between the two Southern poets, Lanier and Poe. Poe had inveighed against "the heresy of the didactic." He disclaimed all aims in art except the rousing of emotion. Lanier, on the other hand, held that art has a moral end. This gave to his poetry a joyful and hopeful air, while Poe's was enveloped in cloud and gloom. This made Lanier himself a steady and indomitable worker, even to the very end of his days, while Poe worked only in the intervals of debauch. When strength failed, Lanier was still undaunted. There was nothing sorrowful in his heroism. He cheered others when he could have no hope for himself, at least in this present life. He dictated his poem "Sunrise" with a fever of one hundred and four degrees, when he was too weak to hold a pen or to lift food to his mouth. His last lectures were read from his chair; every sentence seemed as if it might be his last; in the carriage, after the lecture was over, his exhaustion was so great that it was a problem whether he could reach his home

alive. On November 19, 1880, he wrote to Paul Hamilton Hayne:

For six months past a ghastly fever has been taking possession of me each day at about twelve M., and holding my head under the surface of indescribable distress for the next twenty hours, subsiding only enough each morning to let me get on my working-harness, but never intermitting. A number of tests show it to be not the "hectic" so well known in consumption; and to this day it has baffled all the skill I could find in New York, in Philadelphia, and here. I have myself been disposed to think it arose purely from the bitterness of having to spend my time in making academic lectures and boy's books—pot-boilers all—when a thousand songs are singing in my heart that will certainly kill me if I do not utter them soon. But I don't think this diagnosis has found favor with any practical physician; and meantime I work day after day in such suffering as is piteous to see.

The end was sure to come, and speedily. He was taken to Polk County, North Carolina, to camp out in the open air, in hope that this might bring relief. But there he was seized with deadly illness. The closing scene is best described by Mrs. Lanier, who was with him to the end:

"We are left alone (August 29th) with one another. On the last night of the summer comes a change. His love and immortal will hold off the destroyer of our summer yet one more week, until the forenoon of September 7th, and then falls the frost, and that unfaltering will renders its supreme submission to the adored will of God."

Lanier was not a great poet, but he had in him the making of a great poet. He had made unmistakable progress in his art; his best work is, in occasional passages, equal to any other work of his country, if not of his time. There are lightning-flashes of true

poetry, which seem to promise the advent of an illuminating sun. But the poet has not his powers under full control; he runs off upon a tangent when a fancy strikes him; and these fancies often turn out to be only conceits. He has originality, but he seems too often to be straining after novelty. He has the gift of melody, but he sometimes mars the music of his verse by the effort to bring it into harmony with a mechanical theory. In short, he lacks, except at rare moments, the spontaneity that belongs to the highest poetical achievement, and the inevitableness of the truest poetical inspiration. But, when all this is said, we have still to take account of a noble poetic gift in process of development—a gift so noble as to cause unending sorrow, when we see it coming to its earthly end.

Such an end of such a gift suggests to us one of the most serious problems of theology. Man, as an intellectual, moral, and religious being, does not attain the end of his existence on earth. His development is imperfect here. Will divine wisdom leave its work incomplete? Must there not be a hereafter, for the full growth of man's powers, and for the satisfaction of his aspirations? Created, unlike the brute, with infinite capacities for moral progress, must there not be an immortal existence in which those capacities shall be brought into exercise? Surely we have here an argument from God's love and wisdom for the immortality of the righteous. God will not treat the righteous as the tyrant of Florence treated Michelangelo, when he bade him carve out of ice a statue, which would melt under the first rays of the sun. Lanier died with

a thousand songs singing in his soul; his head and heart were full of poems. Is all that wealth to go for naught? We can only point to the poet's own unwavering assurance of the life to come, and to the promises of the Christ in whom he trusted, to answer the gloomy assertion that death ends all. Reason may not enable us to predict a certain and personal immortality. But Christ has "brought life and immortality to light" in his blessed gospel; and what reason cannot prove, He proves who rose himself from the dead, and so conquered death forevermore. The end of Lanier was very different from the end of Poe. While Poe's life ended in darkness and despair, Lanier's ended in hope and joy. To Lanier we may apply without qualification Shelley's triumphant words with regard to Keats:

"He has outsoared the shadow of our night;  
 Envy and calumny, and hate and pain,  
 And that unrest which men miscall delight,  
 Can touch him not and torture not again;  
 From the contagion of the world's slow stain  
 He is secure, and now can never mourn  
 A heart grown cold, a head grown gray in vain.

. . . . .

He lives, he wakes—'tis Death is dead, not he;  
 Mourn not for Adonais!"

**IX**

**WALT WHITMAN**

“ Man might live at first  
The animal life: but is there nothing more?  
In due time, let him critically learn  
How he lives; and, the more he gets to know  
Of his own life's adaptabilities,  
The more joy-giving will his life become.  
Thus man, who hath this quality, is best.”

—*Browning's "Cleon."*

NOTE. The figures appended to extracts from Whitman's poems refer to pages in the most complete and critical edition of the "Leaves of Grass" hitherto published—that of David McKay. Philadelphia, to whom the author gives thanks for the privilege of transcription.



## WALT WHITMAN

SYDNEY SMITH once observed that, when he had a cold, he was uncertain whether there were thirty-nine Muses and nine Articles, or nine Muses and thirty-nine Articles. The present writer has no cold, but he is in an analogous state of uncertainty. In a previous work, "The Great Poets and Their Theology," he found nine great poets to correspond with the nine Muses, and they were Homer, Vergil, Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, Goethe, Wordsworth, Browning, and Tennyson. In writing on "American Poets and Their Theology," he would like also to find nine American poets to admire and to criticize. But thus far there are only eight: namely, Bryant, Emerson, Whittier, Poe, Longfellow, Lowell, Holmes, and Lanier. Who shall be the ninth? A large majority of his readers will probably answer by naming Whitman. Is the *vox populi*, in this case, a *vox Dei*? The future of American poetry will largely depend upon our conclusion; for "like people, like poet" is just as true as "like people, like priest." For this reason I wish to weigh Whitman's life and work in absolutely just balances, even though adverse criticism may be attributed to overplus of "malignant virtue" in the reviewer.

The choice of the nickname "Walt" was characteristic of the man. He rebelled against his patronymic

"Walter," as too formal and too stiff. He wished to be unlike his father, who was a steady and somber man. But he also wished to be unconventional in all his ways. The "hail-fellow-well-met," of low life, seemed to him more comradelike and more humane than the elegant gentlemen who bore the names of Sir Walter Raleigh and Sir Walter Scott. Revolt against tradition, or restriction, or law of any sort, unless it were the law of his own impulses, was a part of his nature. He desired to be an original force in literature and in life. His poetical works begin with a declaration of independence which gives us a valuable clue to their total significance:

One's-Self I sing,—a simple, separate Person;  
Yet utter the word Democratic, the word *En-masse*.

Of Physiology from top to toe I sing;  
Not physiognomy alone, nor brain alone, is worthy  
for the muse

—I say the Form complete is worthier far;  
The Female equally with the male I sing.

Of Life immense in passion, pulse, and power,  
Cheerful—for freest action form'd, under the laws  
divine,  
The Modern Man I sing. (11)

Walt Whitman may properly be considered from three points of view—his art, his morality, and his religion. In his art, he aims to get back to Nature. And here there is a grain of truth. Wordsworth said well that

"To the solid ground of Nature trusts the mind  
That builds for aye."

But Nature is an ambiguous term. Shall we confine it to the *physical* world, and make poetry merely descriptive of sunsets and storms? There is no poetry that does not find *meanings* in the outward world—suggestions of truth and beauty. Shall we include *man* in Nature, but only man's *body*? Then we forget that body has no value or claim upon our attention except as it serves the higher uses of the soul. Poetry must recognize the relation of man's body to his spirit, of his spirit to its fellows, and of all men to God, or it will be destitute of beauty and of truth. An all-embracing atheism and materialism ~~cuts~~ poetry loose from its real sources of inspiration. Nature finds its meanings only in man, and man finds his meanings only in God. Art without morality, and morality without religion, are equally impossible. Poetry aims to depict, not the conceptions of savage men, but those of thoughtful and cultivated men. The gentleman and the Christian show what man's nature really is. Not the body, but the soul that dominates the body, is most worthy of admiration. If poetry does not see the higher in the lower, it degrades and pollutes. Art must idealize, or perish.

Bernard Shaw tells us that the great ethical movement of our day is the turkey-trot. In a similar vein we may say that the great esthetic movement of our day is free-verse. Free-verse is destitute of rhyme, and it has only an irregular and rudimental rhythm. Walt Whitman is its leading representative. That poetry may take the form of free-verse may be granted, while yet it is denied that Walt Whitman's free-verse is poetry, or, if poetry at all, is more than

an infantile and undeveloped kind of poetry. The free-verse of the Ninetieth Psalm, like some of the Ossianic ballads, has other merits besides that of freedom. It reproduces Nature, not only in its variety, but also in its ideal aspects. Those ideal aspects are suggested and symbolized in the measured cadence of Milton's "Paradise Lost," and in every worthy specimen of blank verse. Poetry is an expression of ideal truth in its normal relations, and especially in its subordination of the physical to the spiritual. It must recognize the moral element in man. Hence the glorification of bodily organs and passions, and the assumption that the soul is a mere efflux from the body, are fatal to the poet's art and influence. Man is not supreme in the universe. God is not a mere name for the All. There is a higher Personality than that of the poet, and a theistic faith is necessary to the greatest poetry. Evolution builds on the past. It is no merit to be wholly unlike. When the moral element is lacking, egotism leads the writer to overestimate his own powers and to regard all his observations as of equal value. All things become divine, and he praises the vile as well as the worthy. The world becomes a wilderness of rubbish, which he merely inventories. In his view, man becomes free, not by entering into the communion and life of the personal God, but by asserting the right of every vicious impulse to control his action. This is moral slavery and ruin, and this is the philosophy which underlies the verse of Walt Whitman.

Before proceeding to verify these statements by excerpts from his writings, it will be well to glance

at the facts of his life, and, if possible, to discover the sources of his philosophy. He was born in the township of Huntington, on the northwestern corner of Long Island, on May 31, 1819. His birthplace was more closely connected with the opposite Connecticut shore, only ten miles away, than it was with the growing village of Brooklyn, forty miles to the west. From Connecticut had come the mingled English, Independent, and Quaker stock, which found its unique expression in himself. When he was only four years of age, however, his father removed to Brooklyn, and there pursued the trade of a master-carpenter. But the boy frequently visited his grandmother at the old home. There he gathered the eggs of sea-gulls and speared eels. In the admirable biography by George Rice Carpenter, these surroundings are credited with an important influence upon his mental development: "The poetic gift was born in him when he listened to the song of the bird calling its dead mate, and heard the melodious hissing of the sea whispering of death." An element of romance was added by the farmers who occasionally dug in the beach for Captain Cook's treasures, and by the talks of the seamen who had manned our ships in the war of 1812.

He was a sturdy child, bred by his father to the carpenter's bench, and possessed of but two educational advantages, the district school and the circulating library. The "Thousand and One Nights" and the "Waverley Novels" absorbed him. At twelve he became office-boy to a kind-hearted lawyer, then similarly served a physician. He had no ambition for college.

His real training was that of a printer's apprentice and of a school-teacher. Experience as a compositor led to sundry contributions to the "Long Island Patriot" and to George P. Morris's "Mirror" in New York City; and his service as a country pedagogue at Babylon, on the southern shore of Long Island, gave him some practice as a debater and public speaker. He was at that time an abolitionist, a teetotaler, an opponent of capital punishment. He was also a Democrat; he entered the realm of politics, advocated the election of Van Buren to the Presidency, stood for Free-Soil and Reform.

After 1841 he was typesetter, contributor, editor, in turn, of various ephemeral periodicals, and ended by serving on the staff of the Brooklyn "Daily Eagle." For a while his dress betokened social aspirations, for he wore frock-coat, tall hat, and boutonnière. But he was a born Bohemian, and society irked him. He rebelled against authority and self-sacrifice. He spoke of himself as "stubborn, restless, and unhappy." He was too self-centered easily to find companionship, and he took to solitude, assumed the dress of a workman, and sought relief by wandering. "Lazy and hazy," he spent a couple of years in travel, if so we may call working his way through the South. In my judgment, this tour constituted an epoch in his life, and for this reason I shall speak more fully about it hereafter, and shall seek further light upon it from his writings. In the meantime, let me only say that he was for a brief period an editor on the staff of the New Orleans "Crescent," and that after a few months of such service he made his way homeward by way of

Chicago and the Great Lakes, though carrying with him affectionate remembrances of the "exquisite wines," the "perfect and mild French brandy," the "splendid and roomy and leisurely barrooms" of the St. Charles and St. Louis hotels.

In 1848 either satiety or poverty compelled him to return to his father's house in Brooklyn. He was now thirty years of age. He spent several years in assisting his father's work of carpentry and building. But all the while he was meditating and writing. He was seized with the ambition to put his experience into literature, and into literature of a new sort. Between 1850 and 1855 a great change occurred. Until he reached the age of thirty-one he had been a mere writer for newspapers. After this time he was a writer of verse, so unusual in form and so strange in spirit that it attracted attention and criticism. The genesis of Walt Whitman's peculiar genius has occupied the inquiries of many biographers, but with little of positive result. William Blake, William Wordsworth, and Samuel Warren are said to have given him hints. More weight may be attributed to the suggestion that without Whitman's knowledge of the English Bible, its Old Testament parallelism and accompanying rhythm, he never would have devised his method. But it was substance rather than form that he thought most of. He wished to be the poet of the crowd, the mouthpiece of primitive humanity, the expression of man's physical nature. With this view, in 1855, he gave up manual work and devoted himself to literature, so far as an indolent resignation of himself to observation and to writing could accomplish this.

There were two sources of his philosophy. Not enough attention has been given by his biographers to the strain of Quaker blood in his veins, and to the influence of Quakerism upon his early religious thought and life. The Van Velsors, from whom he sprang on his mother's side, were of Quaker ancestry. But his grandfather was a friend and comrade of Elias Hicks, the Quaker preacher, who began the movement against the orthodox beliefs of George Fox, and became the head and leader of the sect called Hicksites. Whittier stood by the old faith; but Hicks gave up the deity of Christ and the inspiration of the Scriptures. In Hicks there was a spirit of revolt and self-assertion that was lacking in the older body. All mere forms of religion, even churchgoing and public prayer, were made little of. And Walt Whitman was brought up in an atmosphere of shrewd worldliness which placed dependence solely upon the inward light—an inward light which, in his case, showed its insufficiency, apart from the Christian revelation, as a guide to belief or conduct.

The second influence which shaped the philosophy of Walt Whitman was more immediate than that of Elias Hicks; it was that of Ralph Waldo Emerson. A newspaper reviewer, soon after the publication of Whitman's great work, the "Leaves of Grass," described it as the production of both a transcendentalist and a rowdy. About the transcendentalism there can be no doubt, and to my mind it is equally clear that this was mainly derived from Emerson. If the reader is surprised at this, or inclined to doubt, I would refer him to my exposition of Emerson's philosophy in a preceding essay of this volume. In these early days



Whitman went about everywhere with a copy of Emerson's "Essays" in his pocket. He called Emerson his master, and Emerson himself recognized in Whitman the same ideas of which he alone had been thus far the advocate, remarking pleasantly that "Leaves of Grass" was a combination of the Bhagavad Gita and the New York "Herald." Whitman's disjointed and rhapsodic method of utterance, both in prose and in poetry, was possibly caught from Emerson, together with his fundamental conceptions that Nature is originally and mainly physical, that spirit is an efflux from matter, and that mind is to be interpreted in bodily terms. A materialistic, deterministic, and fatalistic philosophy pervades all of Whitman's writing. It is the glaring but natural outcome of Emerson's more guarded but none the less pernicious doctrine. This philosophy is the secret of Whitman's glorification of man's physical nature, and it makes "Leaves of Grass" little more than the history of his own body. That body he conceives to be only a significant part of the vast universe, of which good and evil are alike and equally the manifestations. The poet is a part of the All—he is indeed the soul of the All—worthy of admiration therefore in all his impulses and powers. Whitman is a pantheist like the Brahman, and he can sing the praises of lust, as the Hindu carves its doings in the Caves of Elephanta.

The publication of "Leaves of Grass" was unquestionably the advent of a novelty in American literature. Until 1855 Whitman had been content with prose. But desire for independence grew by what it fed on. *Wanderlust*, at first a physical instinct, be-

came at last consciously intellectual. Freedom became a passion, and asserted itself in his writing. Every great passion tends to rhythmical expression. Abraham Lincoln's address at Gettysburg may be put into lines that read like poetry. In his Southern tour Whitman had given such rein to impulse that he came to regard all impulse as divine. He felt himself surcharged with elemental forces that had hitherto no proper outlet in literature. He wished to voice the humanity and energy of the illiterate horde with which he identified himself—he would represent, not the world of books, but the world of men. He would make his verse conform to his subject: he spoke of his poems as

lawless at first perusal, although on closer examination a certain regularity appears, like the recurrence of lesser and larger waves on the seashore, rolling in without intermission, and fitfully rising and falling.

Emerson did much to commend "Leaves of Grass" to the general public. He called it "the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom that America has yet contributed." Whitman says of Emerson's letter conveying this eulogium, "I regarded it as the charter of an Emperor." This was only natural, since Whitman was the inheritor of Emerson's philosophy, if not of his delicacy or of his style. But Emerson greatly objected to the publication of his private letter, and he afterward added criticisms which seemed like confessions of regret for his premature enthusiasm. For Whitman was no blind or passive admirer, but one determined to carry Emerson's philosophy to its logical conclusion. In a long talk with Whitman on Boston

Common, Emerson sought to convince him that rhyme and rhythm are not unnatural, and that reticence with regard to some bodily relations is consistent with ideal truth. Whitman was unconvinced, though somewhat impressed by the words of his master. He could write with unusual humility:

Whether my friends claim it for me or not, I know well enough that in respect to pictorial talent, dramatic situations, and especially in verbal melody and all the conventional technique of poetry, not only the divine works that to-day stand ahead in the world's reading, but dozens more, transcend (some of them immeasurably transcend) all I have done or could do.

But he also wrote a eulogy of Emerson which served for self-justification:

His final influence is to make his students cease to worship anything—almost cease to believe in anything, outside of themselves. . . . No teacher ever taught, that has so provided for his pupil's setting up independently—no truer evolutionist.

He came at last to depreciate his benefactor. In 1872 he wrote:

Emerson has just been this way . . . lecturing. He maintains the same attitude—draws on the same themes—as twenty-five years ago. It all seems to me quite attenuated (the *first* drawing of a good pot of tea, you know, and Emerson's was the heavenly herb itself—but what must one say to a *second*, or even *third* or *fourth* infusion?)

And the result of Emerson's criticism, like the opposition of other critics, was only to confirm the poet in his chosen method. So he writes:

When the book aroused such a storm of anger and condemnation everywhere, I went off to the East end of Long Island

and Peconic Bay. Then came back to New York with the confirmed resolution, from which I never afterwards wavered, to go on with my poetic enterprise in my own way, and finish it as well as I could.

Whitman's aims and methods were certainly original. In notes which he left at his death, he charged himself:

Make no quotations, and no reference to other writers. Lumber the writing with nothing—let it go as lightly as the bird flies in the air or a fish swims in the sea. Avoid all poetical similes; be faithful to the perfect likelihoods of nature—healthy, exact, simple, disdaining ornaments. Do not go into criticisms or arguments at all; make full-blooded, rich, flush, natural works. Insert natural things, indestructibles, idioms, characteristics, rivers, states, persons, and so forth. Be full of strong sensual germs! . . . Poet! beware lest your poems are made in the spirit that comes from the study of pictures of things—and not from the spirit that comes from the contact with real things themselves.

Emerson's later judgments with regard to Whitman were, as I have already intimated, less favorable than were his earlier utterances. He calls Whitman's catalogues of natural objects "the auctioneer's inventories of a warehouse." The poet mistook these for poetry, whereas they were simply materials for poetry. His philosophy spoiled his art. If Whitman was a poet at all, he was a poet of chaos, for his work is "without form and void"; the creative and shaping hand is lacking. He does not perceive that art is not merely the copyist of nature, but the copyist of the higher nature, the discoverer of the unifying principle of nature, the revelation of the spiritual and moral Author and End of nature. Since Whitman would not recognize the God of nature, he could see nature only in bits. He

was "hypnotized by phenomena"; like Yankee Doodle, he "could not see the town, there were so many houses." This is the real explanation of his wearisome cataloguing, which often runs into a maundering vacuity. It also accounts for his eulogy of the mean and the low, the vulgar and the vile. He has no sense of proportion, because he has no proper standard of judgment. He forgets that nature is man's garden, a garden not perfect, but one which man is to dress and keep. Poetry sees the ideal thought in nature and reproduces it in verse. To fancy that the ugly and the vicious are divine, that one man is as good as another, merely because both are found in the world, is to make real poetry impossible.

This same philosophy degrades the form of art as well as its substance. Beauty wakens in us sympathetic feeling, and clamors for rhythmical expression. The poet thinks instinctively in numbers—the numbers indeed are born with the thought. The highest truth clothes itself in melodious phrase. Great poets are great artists as well as great lovers of truth. As the sense of beauty and of truth becomes more acute, poetry becomes more rhythmical and more melodious. Recitative gives place to song. Walt Whitman scouts these higher modes of expression, and imitates only the voices of physical and animal nature. But in doing this he descends to the lower methods of aboriginal man, and, to adopt his own phrase, "sends over the roofs of the world only a barbaric yawp." We might as well give up Handel and Beethoven, and go back to the music of tom-toms. The lower form of poetry indicates a lower form of

truth, and copies only a lower form of nature. In my judgment, Whitman's best poems, the "Song of the Universal," the "Proud Music of the Storm," the "Song of the Redwood Tree," the "Song of the Exposition," and, above all, "O Captain! my Captain!" are those in which he comes nearest to the conventional forms of poetical expression, most nearly forgets his dogmas of the body, and most avails himself of the garnered wisdom of the past.

Before I pass from the consideration of the mere form of Whitman's verse, I must quote his greatest poem, if only to show how near he came to achieving both technical and emotional success. "O Captain! my Captain!" will live, when all else that he has written is forgotten. Better than any other poem, it expresses the universal sorrow which followed the death of our martyred President, Abraham Lincoln:

O Captain! my Captain! our fearful trip is done;  
 The ship has weather'd every rack, the prize we sought is  
     won;  
 The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,  
 While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring:  
     But O heart! heart! heart!  
     O the bleeding drops of red,  
     Where on the deck my Captain lies,  
     Fallen cold and dead.

O Captain! my Captain! rise up and hear the bells;  
 Rise up—for you the flag is flung—for you the bugle trills;  
 For you bouquets and ribbon'd wreaths—for you the shores  
     a-crowding;  
 For you they call, the swaying mass, their eager faces turning;  
 Here Captain! dear father!  
     This arm beneath your head;  
     It is some dream that on the deck  
     You've fallen cold and dead.

My Captain does not answer, his lips are pale and still;  
My father does not feel my arm, he has no pulse nor will;  
The ship is anchor'd safe and sound, its voyage closed and  
done;  
From fearful trip, the victor ship, comes in with object won:  
Exult, O shores, and ring, O bells!  
But I, with mournful tread,  
Walk the deck my Captain lies,  
Fallen cold and dead. (375)

Here is genuine emotion, but emotion clothed in nearly correct metrical form. It shows that Whitman could write poetry when his soul was stirred by something outside himself. There are defects even here which it were ungracious to criticize, but they are all defects due to his method, and we lose sight of them when we enter sympathetically into his grief over the unspeakable loss which the nation suffered when its great Captain died. Unfortunately, with all its occasional flashes of genius, his free-verse is ordinarily not so near the requirements of poetry as is some of his prose. Its art is infantile and defective; it is indolent and often commonplace; the most remarkable thing about it is that it was ever printed as poetry.

Another infelicity clings to Walt Whitman's art; namely, his boundless egotism. This too is the fruit of his philosophy. He is possessed by the pantheistic delusion that the universe reaches personality only in man. He himself is the typical manifestation of the universe and its typical representative. Every atom of his body and every thought of his mind is therefore of value. The complete expression of himself will be the exposition of universal humanity. He criticized Ruskin's view that poetry should have

nothing to do with the poet's special personality, nor exhibit the least trace of it—like Shakspeare's great unsurpassable dramas. But I have dashed at *the greater drama going on within myself and every human being—that is what I have been after.*

Homer, Vergil, and Dante have been reticent about themselves; we know little about them; their poetry is objective rather than subjective. Whitman would reverse all this; he says unblushingly, "I celebrate myself"; he would express in his verse every impulse of his nature. This naked individualism is the result of self-deification. And this naked individualism, in turn, corrupted his art. He was too great an admirer of himself to be conscious of his own defects of style. He could not tell the commonplace from the inspired.

Our criticism of Whitman's art becomes very quickly a criticism of his morality. His blatant egotism is the egotism of the atheist who sees nothing in the universe higher than himself. He sees no divine holiness in contrast with his own moral imperfection; he perceives no moral evil in himself, and so is blind to the greatness of the good. His sense of sin is as weak as his sense of God. But I must not prematurely condemn him. There is one utterance of his which has been quoted in his favor. In his letter to Edward Dowden, dated January 18, 1872, he describes his aim in literature:

I seek to typify living Human Personality, immensely animal, with immense passions, immense amativeness, immense adhesiveness—in the woman immense maternity—and then, in both, immensely far, a *moral conscience*, and in always realizing



the direct and indirect control of the divine laws through all and over all forever.

So far as my reading of his works informs me, this is the only tribute which the author makes to morality, or law, or God. It is so exceptional a tribute, and is so incongruous with the general drift and spirit of his writings, that I must regard it as a tribute to his correspondent, rather than to the great realities which his poems and his life ignored. As we shall hereafter see, the poet was quite capable of impersonating a morality which he did not possess, in order that he might not utterly lose the good opinion of his friends.

The Whitman cult is so frequently unacquainted with his poems and his life, that duty seems to require the publication of features in both which eulogists have hitherto ignored. It is a thankless and unpleasing task, and I undertake it with regret. I proceed to quote certain passages of his verse, in which egotism and coarseness are evenly matched:

Walt Whitman am I, a Kosmos, of mighty Manhattan the  
son,  
Turbulent, fleshy and sensual, eating, drinking and breeding;  
No sentimentalist—no stander above men and women, or  
apart from them;  
No more modest than immodest. (54)

Joy of the friendly, plenteous dinner—the strong carouse,  
and drinking!

. . . . .  
O, while I live, to be the ruler of life—not a slave!

. . . . .  
To be indeed a God! (384)

Teacher of the unquenchable creed, namely, egctism. (168)

I know perfectly well my own egotism;  
I know my omnivorous lines, and will not write any less;  
And would fetch you, whoever you are, flush with myself. (81)

I will effuse egotism, and show it underlying all—and I will  
be the bard of personality;  
And I will show of male and female that either is but the  
equal of the other;  
And sexual organs and acts! do you concentrate in me—for  
I am determin'd to tell you with courageous clear voice,  
to prove you illustrious. (24)

Behold! the body includes and is the meaning, the main  
concern—and includes and is the Soul. (25)

I swear I think now that everything without exception has an  
eternal Soul. (391)

I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journey-work of  
the stars;  
And the pismire is equally perfect, and a grain of sand, and  
the egg of the wren. (62)

Unscrew the locks from the doors!  
Unscrew the doors themselves from their jambs! (54)

Through me forbidden voices;  
Voices of sexes and lusts—voices veil'd, and I remove the  
veil;  
Voices indecent, by me clarified and transfigur'd. (55)

Fall behind me, States!  
A man before all—myself, typical before all. (303)

The divinity of the common man was Whitman's thesis, and that for the reason that the individual summarizes and expresses the universal. It was a dim apprehension of the universal, without recognition of its unifying principle. Whitman perceived the power

that works in and through nature, but failed to see the personality of that power. He chose a non-moral, instead of a moral God. The only unifying principle he could discern was himself. So he could believe all his ideas and passions to be manifestations of the indwelling Deity. His system was an "illegitimate consecration of the finite." Good and evil alike, in others as well as in himself, were revelations of the spirit that moved through all, and that spirit was only the personification of matter, something non-moral, evil as well as good. He liked the "refreshing wickedness" of stage-drivers and ferry-hands, for to him, in quite other than the scriptural sense, there was "nothing common or unclean." What Emerson said of Gibbon applies equally to him: "The man has no shrine—a man's most important possession." Hence he could glorify every bodily appetite, and make even the life of the prostitute a subject of his verse. I must connect this celebration of vileness with his own practical cutting loose from restraint. He would not have thus deified passion, if he had not previously broken away from a personal and holy God.

As to Whitman's immorality, at least in his early life, we are not left to conjecture. His own letter to John Addington Symonds, dated August 10, 1890, and written in his seventy-second year, is sufficiently explicit:

My life, young manhood, mid-age, times South, etc., have been jolly bodily, and doubtless open to criticism. Though unmarried I have had six children—two are dead—one living Southern grandchild, fine boy, writes to me occasionally—circumstances (connected with their fortune and benefit) have prevented me from intimate relations.

This o  
don't

I do not find in this, or in any other writing of Walt Whitman, the least sign of regret for the "jolly life" of those Southern years, or for the subsequent abandonment of his offspring. His paternity was like that of Rousseau, which permitted his own children to be foundlings. Bliss Perry, in his otherwise comprehensive and judicial biography of Whitman, has minimized the poet's aberrations, and has attributed them to sudden floods of passion which overtook a sensitive nature and served as an early stage of its education. Much as I should like to accept this explanation, it seems to me inadequate, in view of two outstanding facts: first, that Whitman never expressed regret for the escapades, never suppressed or retracted what have always seemed his vicious utterances; and, secondly, that, with regard to the most serious suspicion of his correspondent, Whitman ventures upon no direct denials. Symonds had been reading "Calamus," a group of poems celebrating the intimate friendship of men for men. Some of the lines troubled him, and, as Perry says:

"His familiarity with certain passages of Greek literature increased his curiosity. He wrote to Whitman begging for a more exact elucidation, and Whitman, in order to avoid any possible misconstruction, wrote frankly in reply concerning his own early relations with women."

Yes, but he said nothing about his early relations with men.

Whitman was something of a *poseur*. His urbanity and dignity were at times the veil which hid an inward sense of difference between his own standards and those accepted by the world around him. He would not

argue, and he would not disclose; but he could ignore. So he went steadily on his way, only the more determined by criticism to live his own life and maintain his own independence of all ordinary moral as well as all ordinary literary standards. He had a fine faculty of concealment, but he was also capable of arrant dishonesty. His persistent self-glorification and occasional falsification of facts throw doubt upon the sincerity of his seeming disclaimers. Whitman was not only guilty of indelicacy in sending to various journals extravagant eulogies of his own poems, but he prefaced his "Leaves-Droppings" with a letter to Emerson, from which I quote the following sentences:

The first edition, on which you mailed me that till now unanswered letter, was twelve poems—I printed a thousand copies, and they readily sold; these thirty-two Poems I stereotype, to print several thousand copies of. . . The way is clear to me. A few years, and the average annual call for my Poems is ten or twenty thousand copies—more, quite likely.

Mr. Perry tells us, however, that, of the "Leaves of Grass" of 1855,

"An edition of a thousand copies was planned, but only about eight hundred seem actually to have been printed. . . Then came the tragedy of hope deferred. There were practically no sales. In his old age Whitman used to refer good-naturedly to the one man who actually bought a copy of the 1855 edition."

The biographer calls the letter to Emerson a "romancing about the sale of the first edition," and speaks of

"Whitman's nervous condition at the time. He was over-excited, no doubt, and felt that he was playing for high stakes."

It seems to me rather to deserve severe censure, as a deliberate attempt to deceive the man who had first given him currency and credit in the literary world. Whitman's appetite for praise grew by what it fed on; self-appreciation became monumental; it lasted to the end; for, long after admirers, themselves straitened in means, were contributing to his support because they believed him penniless, he was erecting for himself a mausoleum which cost four thousand dollars, and at his death he had in the bank several thousand dollars more. "The good, gray poet" must submit to some discount of his pretensions.

Late in life Whitman said to Prof. G. K. Palmer: "There are things in 'Leaves of Grass' which I would no sooner write now than I would cut off my right hand; but I am glad I printed them." Whittier called the book "muck, obscenity, vulgarity, bombast," and he threw it into the fire. The intensity and particularity of its references to sensual relations disgusted him. It was indeed a sort of phallic frenzy. Thoreau praised it as a study of nature, but thought that the beasts might have so spoken. That was a significant and searching criticism. Whitman admired the beasts. He said:

I think I could go and live with the animals. I stand and look at them long and long. They are so placid and self-contained. They do not fret and whine about their condition; they do not lie awake in the dark and weep for their sins; they do not make me sick, discussing their duty to God. Not one of them is respectable or unhappy over the whole earth. What blurt is this about virtue and about vice? . . . Evil propels me, and refusal of evil propels me; I am indifferent.

Whitman's rejection of a holy God is followed by a blinding of his soul to sin. And of this it has been well said, "The man who lives like an animal and cares not for moral failure, having no desire for things noble or great, is worse than an animal, because he is so much more than an animal." In "Leaves of Grass" Whitman hints indeed at physical relations and contacts of which the mere animal is ignorant and guiltless, and which remind the reader of Oscar Wilde.

What is the truth about his glorification of the body? We may grant that there is a squeamishness which is only prudery. Oversensitiveness with regard to bodily organs is a sign of undisciplined imagination. Education gives a certain freedom, both in conversation and in plastic art. The human form is noble and divine, even in its nudity. But only when immoral suggestion is wholly absent, and when form suggests the supremacy of spirit. In other words, nature in this aspect utters a symbolic language, and is beautiful only when she is moral; when she is immoral, she needs to be ashamed. The bodily organs and relations are worthy of reverence, and are subjects for poetry, only so far as they symbolize spiritual truth and minister to its influence. To make the body in itself an object of worship, or to regard it as the parent and master of the soul, is to reverse all right relations and to teach a fundamental immorality. Yet this is the doctrine of Whitman. His poetry is a poetry of the flesh. Reti-  
cence with regard to sexual relations is necessary if we would recognize the rightful reign of spirit over body. But Whitman has exalted obscenity into a principle.

It would be difficult to conceive more unblushing announcements of immoral ambition than are contained in some of his poems. The Attorney General of Massachusetts evidently took this view of the case when he threatened to prosecute Whitman's publishers for printing an obscene volume, and James R. Osgood and Company in consequence gave up the publication of the "Leaves of Grass." Secretary James Harlan, in Washington, in like manner dismissed Whitman from his \$1,600 clerkship because that book was found in his possession. But the poet gained stout defenders. Rossetti declared the work to be "incomparably the largest performance of our period in poetry," though he objected to its "agglomeration." William Dean Howells spoke of Whitman, after a visit, as "emanating an atmosphere of purity and serenity," in spite of the poet's own assertions that he loved and depicted impurity as much as he loved and depicted purity. John Burroughs said that "Americans may now come home: unto us a man is born." He credited Whitman with "the primal spirit of poesy itself," "the most buoyant and pervasive spirituality," "the most uncompromising religious purpose," though he saw in him grave defects. Alcott, Conway, Bryant, Beecher, came to see Whitman; and in England, Lord Houghton, Myers, and Swinburne praised him, though Swinburne came at last to break away from his spell. Women have been found to justify his erotic verse, and to see in it only the frank avowal of innocent natural instincts. I am content to place my reader in the seat of judgment. Since he "knows the ordinance of God, that they who practise such things are worthy



of death," let him judge whether those are guiltless who, though they do not the same, yet "consent with those who practise them."

There came a day when Whitman's glorification of sexual relations became a glorification of comradeship. The passion of man for woman gave place to the passion of man for man, and this passion merged into something democratic and universal. Our Civil War stirred him. I do not find that he had interest in the slave, or that he rejoiced in his emancipation. He was no abolitionist, at least in his later years. But he was concerned for the Union of the States, and for the men who were defending it. His own brother was wounded in one of the first battles of the war, and Whitman started for Washington to care for him. When the brother recovered from what proved to be a slight wound, Whitman began a visitation and help to others who were sick and wounded, until he had ministered in this way to nearly a hundred thousand men. We must not withhold from this service our grateful acknowledgments. It was a service entirely voluntary and without pay. It was not the ordinary service of a nurse, but that of a companion and friend. He brought paper and envelopes, with postage-stamps, and wrote letters dictated by the boys to their parents or friends at home. He carried to thousands of bed-sides little packets of sweetmeats or tobacco. He even read the Bible to those who requested it, though he ordinarily trusted more to his own kindly and sympathetic talk, to cheer his patient. All this was done in hours of leisure from the work of the government office in which he had found employment, and its value

Whitman  
was a  
damne  
S. Cact.

largely consisted in the unconventional and hearty method of his address. This practical work for others seems to be the result of a vow registered at the beginning of the war, on April 16, 1861, and suggested by the patriotic rush to arms by so many of the youth of the land. It indicates a wider outlook and an impulse to self-sacrifice, which before this time we see nothing of. The record of this new resolve was found among his papers after his death, and it reads as follows:

I have this day, this hour, resolved to inaugurate for myself a pure, perfect, sweet, clean-blooded robust body, by ignoring all drinks but water and pure milk, and all fat meats, late suppers—a great body, a purged, cleansed, spiritualized, invigorated body.

And in one of his poems he writes:

I have loved the earth, sun, animals—I have despised riches,  
I have given alms to every one that ask'd, stood up for the  
stupid and crazy, devoted my income and labor to others,  
I have hated tyrants, argued not concerning God, had  
patience and indulgence toward the people, taken off my  
hat to nothing known or unknown,

. . . . .

I have dismissed whatever insulted my own Soul or defiled my  
Body. (303)

. . . . .

Upon this breast has many a dying soldier lean'd, to breathe  
his last;

This arm, this hand, this voice, have nourish'd, rais'd,  
restored,

To life recalling many a prostrate form:

—I am willing to wait to be understood by the growth of the  
taste of myself,

I reject none, I permit all. (304)

There is no need of censorship of his writings after 1861. His literary work reflects a new and better condition of body. It was well that he then pledged himself to abstinence, for the demands upon his physical system had hitherto been great, and the calls for sympathy in his new work of relieving suffering were still more exhausting. In 1873, at the early age of fifty-four, he broke down. A stroke of paralysis shattered his seemingly invulnerable constitution, and from the collapse that followed he never fully recovered. After a time he retired to Camden, New Jersey, bought him a poor little house, and, with the aid of contributions from friends at home and abroad, spent the remainder of his life. He had many visitors. On his seventieth birthday he was given a public reception in Camden, at which his friends gave him praise. But he was, to use his own description of Columbus, “a battered, wrecked old man.” And in 1891, when seventy-two years of age, he breathed his last.

The race from which Walt Whitman sprang has been described as “solid, strong-framed, long-lived, moderate of speech, friendly, fond of their horses and cattle, sluggish in their passions, but fearful when once started.” Our poet possessed all these peculiarities of both body and mind. As a boy, he was healthy and hearty. As teacher of a country school, composed mostly of girls, he showed little sentiment or partiality toward the sex. As a grown man, he had the calmness and benignity of good nature. These were natural gifts. But behind them and underlying them there was a passion which, when roused, knew no restraint. Robert Louis Stevenson’s description of the Scot, as

"an iceberg over a volcano," might almost apply to Whitman. On occasion he could let himself loose, and he did this in his tour of the South. The echoes of that exuberant life were always sounding within him. But the woes of his country opened to him a larger vision. A sort of national, yes, even of cosmic, consciousness was developed. His chronic good nature poured itself forth in care for the sick and wounded. He gave what strength he had to kindly ministrations at their bedsides, until paralysis seized him and his strength was gone. His after-life in Camden has been celebrated as the monkish retreat of an Oriental guru, lost in the ecstasy of his identification with the All, and quietly awaiting the transforming touch of death. There are other views, however, of that Camden life, and I am permitted to quote the following passages from the private letter of a pastor whose work in that city filled part of the time of Whitman's residence there:

"My residence in Camden came in the period of what might be termed the aftermath of Whitman's influence in the city. As there was not much of the earlier, there was less of the later. And what there was, was wholly inimical to righteousness. His personal laxity of belief, if not of act, produced in his followers a license for physical and mental indulgence. Last winter the noblest Christian woman it was my privilege to know in the city of Camden passed away. She was unmarried and had lived to her eightieth year. She possessed a rare, clear, pure mind, and had a remarkable ability to intuit realities back of appearances. Often, in long conversations with her, have I mentioned the person of Walt Whitman, whose home was four doors removed from hers during her girlhood and young womanhood. She told me that hundreds of times she had passed around the whole block to avoid meeting Walt Whitman, whose very eye terrified her

womanhood. Last fall it was my privilege to baptize the last member of the 'Walt Whitman Club' of Camden. The majority had died drunkards, and only the grace of God had saved this man from a like fate."

The result of my inquiries is negative. The impressions of the aged maiden lady thus quoted may have been derived from the general opinion of Christian circles, which in its turn may have been formed by the perusal of Whitman's books, and not from personal acquaintance. And yet I cannot ignore the testimony of an esteemed pastor to the effect that Walt Whitman's influence was antagonistic to Christianity and to morality.

Walt Whitman's verse was called by Edward Dowden "the poetry of Democracy." John Burroughs too quotes Whitman as saying that the mother-idea of his poems is democracy, and democracy

"carried far beyond politics into the region of taste, the standards of manners and beauty, and even into philosophy and theology."

It was so, only because the poet came to regard himself as the natural representative of the whole race of man. He was an Occidental mystic, who identified himself with the universe, and saw in his own body and soul the very flower of humanity. "He uses the communal 'I,' like Krishna," said Emerson. Self-love and self-worship expanded into a kindly sympathy with all forms of life. A universal good nature was to him the highest form of virtue. All men are your brothers—in their failures as well as in their gifts, in their vices as well as in their virtues—therefore be

good to them! Their faults are part of them—smile, but do not reprove! “Science” is their united intellect; “the States” are their organized force; “Democracy” is their collective will. Whitman is the apostle of this democracy; he could give his time and labor to caring for the suffering, without asking whether they were Unionists or rebels; so he could anticipate a day when there would be “one heart to the globe.” As against the exaggerated nationalism of our day, this has an air of plausibility; in fact, it is but the elevation of the actual Walt Whitman into world-wide validity, the declaration of independence on the part of every individual, the transcending of all boundaries of law, and the enthronement of arbitrary impulse. Democracy of this sort is only anarchy, with a better name, as will appear by mere citation from his verses:

I swear I am for those that have never been master'd!

For those whom laws, theories, conventions, can never  
master. (306)

Copious as you are, I absorb you all in myself, and become  
the master myself. (307)

Race of veterans! Race of victors!  
Race of the soil, ready for conflict! race of the conquering  
march!

(No more credulity's race, abiding-temper'd race;)  
Race henceforth owning no law but the law of itself;  
Race of passion and the storm. (316)

The beauty of independence, departure, actions that rely on  
themselves,

The American contempt for statutes and ceremonies, the  
boundless impatience of restraint. (158)

I have lived to behold man burst forth, and warlike America  
 rise;  
 Hence I will seek no more the food of the northern solitary  
 wilds,  
 No more on the mountains roam, or sail the stormy sea. (247)

O such for me! O an intense life! O full to repletion, and  
 varied!  
 The life of the theatre, bar-room, huge hotel, for me! (264)

I hear the jubilant shouts of millions of men—I hear  
 LIBERTY! (275)

I see but you, O warlike pennant! O banner so broad, with  
 stripes, I sing you only,  
 Flapping up there in the wind. (279)

Once fully enslaved, no nation, state, city, of this earth, ever  
 afterward resumes its liberty. (331)

I only am he who places over you no master, owner, better,  
 God, beyond what waits intrinsically in yourself. (333)

Never was average man, his soul, more energetic, more like a  
 God. (335)

Of This Union, soak'd, welded in blood—of the solemn price  
 paid—of the unnamed lost, ever present in my mind.

Splendor of ended day, floating and filling me!  
 Hour prophetic—hour resuming the past! (338)

I announce a race of splendid and savage old men. (344)

Lo, Soul, see'st thou not, plain as the sun,  
 The only real wealth of wealth in generosity,  
 The only life of life in goodness? (436)

As a strong bird on pinions free,  
 Joyous, the amplest spaces heavenward cleaving,  
 Such be the thought I'd think to-day of thee, America,  
 Such be the recitative I'd bring to-day for thee. (451)

Some of these verses have the ring of true poetry. for they are both rhythmical and musical. It is interesting to learn that Walt Whitman attributed to music much of his inspiration :

Ah, from a little child,  
Thou knowest, Soul, how to me all sounds became music;  
My mother's voice, in lullaby or hymn;

. . . . .

The rain, the growing corn, the breeze among the long-  
leav'd corn,  
The measur'd sea-surf, beating on the sand,  
The twittering bird, the hawk's sharp scream,

. . . . .

The lowing cattle, bleating sheep—the crowing cock at  
dawn. (357, 358)

He was a great lover of the opera, the symphony, and the more intricate chamber-music of trained performers. This is all the more remarkable when we remember that he disdained the full-orbed music of verse, and affected a recitative that was well-nigh destitute of both rhyme and rhythm. In his longing for a larger sort of harmony he threw away the necessary means for its attainment. But he believed that humanity greatly needed "strong, melodious songs," and that the great West of America would yet produce them. This reminds us once more of Rousseau, and of his dream of human freedom and perfection. The freedom, however, is freedom from restraint, and the perfection is development of a congenitally pure spirit. That the service of God is the only true freedom, and that human perfection requires submission to God's law, seems never to have dawned upon his mind. The



result is that, like Rousseau, he preaches a gospel of license, which will lead, as did Rousseau's, to the disintegration of society and to a "revolution clad in hell-fire." He banished from his verse the rhyme and rhythm of the best poetry, although the harmonic chords of the symphony and the submission of the player to the will of the conductor should have taught him that democracy can give perfection to man only as each individual makes his freedom the voluntary executor of law and the willing instrument of the personal God.

All this bears upon the final question of Walt Whitman's religion. For he fancied himself to be not only the preacher, but also the founder, of a new religion. It was a religion of affectionate comradeship, which put, in place of the God of love and law, the misty conception of a materialistic universe, of a democracy free to do evil as well as good, and of an individualism in which the body is supreme. A frugal liver after 1861, he passed into an austerity of diet like that of a Roman Catholic ascetic. Weighing two hundred pounds, six feet in height, with loosened hair and open breast, his Jovian countenance and masterful composure dominated and fascinated his visitors. Abraham Lincoln could say, "Well, he looks like a man!" But he was a compound of the mystic and the hobo. His "cosmic consciousness" was never taught to recognize Him "in whom all things consist," the Creator and Redeemer of mankind. He had no sense of sin, and he felt no need of Christ. Born of the people, he wished to express their life. But he had no proper standard by which to judge. He did not

see that there is much in life which is not worth expressing, much evil which for virtue's sake we need to cover with a veil. And yet there are occasional bursts of lofty thought and emotion that make us regret that his wild nature was not tamed and made to work in normal traces. "It pleased God to reveal his Son in me," said Paul. If Walt Whitman could have had that revelation he might have been a true poet and a true man. That knowledge would have organized and illuminated his verse; would have led him to glorify the spirit rather than the body; would have shown him the duty of confessing sin and of accepting Christ's offer of salvation.

And yet "that which is known of God is manifest," even in him. In a temporary retreat which he found for himself, on Timber Creek near Camden, he communed with nature:

As if for the first time, indeed, creation for the first time noiselessly sank into and through me its placid and untellable lesson,—beyond—O, so infinitely beyond!—anything from art, books, sermons, or from science, old or new. The spirit's hour—religious hour—the visible suggestion of God in space or time—now once definitely indicated, if never again—the untold pointed at—the heavens all paved with it. The Milky Way, as if some superhuman symphony, some ode of universal vagueness disdaining syllable and sound—a flashing glance of Deity, addressed to the soul—all silently—the indescribable night and stars—far off and silently. . .

Proved to me this day, beyond cavil, that it is not my material eyes which finally see,

Nor my material body which finally loves, walks, laughs, shouts, embraces, procreates.

. . . . .

Thought of the Infinite, the All!

Be thou my God! (382, 439)

"He was deeply impressed," says Mr. Perry, "by the Sunday services for the insane, in Doctor Bucke's Asylum, finding beneath these crazed faces, strange as it may seem, the peace of God that passeth all understanding."

These were only transient visitations of insight and of conscience. In his early notes we read what seems to have been the general trend of his thinking:

Boldly assume that all the usual priests . . . are infidels, and the . . . are Faithful Believers . . . I am as much Buddhist as Christian, . . . as much nothing as something. . . The churches are one vast lie. The people do not believe in them; they do not believe in themselves.

I do not despise you, priests;  
My faith is the greatest of faiths, and the least of faiths,  
Enclosing worship ancient and modern, and all between  
ancient and modern. (82)

I have the idea of all, and am all, and believe in all;  
I believe materialism is true, and spiritualism is true—I reject  
no part.

. . . . .

I adopt each theory, myth, god, and demi-god. (189)

In 1880 he said to Doctor Bucke:

I have never had any particular religious experiences—never felt that I needed to be saved—never felt the need of spiritual regeneration—never had any fear of hell, or distrust of the scheme of the universe. I always felt that it was perfectly right and for the best.

"In his youthful note-book he remarks that 'the Bible is now exhausted,' and speaks of 'the castrated goodness of schools and churches.'" "Irritated by 'par-

sons and the police,' he slammed his windows tight on Sunday, to keep out the sound of the bells and choir of a neighboring church." He said:

I always mistrust a deacon; his standard is low. . . The whole ideal of the church is low, loathsome, horrible. . . "Leaves of Grass" is the most religious book among books, crammed full of faith. . . Give those boys a chance—(some urchins who were swimming in the Schuylkill River)—and they would develop the heroic and manly, but they will be spoiled by civilization, religion and the damnable conventions. Their parents will want them to grow up genteel.

I have said that the soul is not more than the body,  
And I have said that the body is not more than the soul;  
And nothing, not God, is greater to me than one's self is,  
And whoever walks a furlong without sympathy, walks to  
his own funeral drest in his shroud.

. . . . .

And I say to mankind, Be not curious about God.

. . . . .

In the faces of men and women I see God, and in my own  
face in the glass. (90)

What do you suppose I would intimate to you in a hundred  
ways, but that man or woman is as good as God?  
And that there is no God any more divine than Yourself? (94)

Underneath Socrates clearly see—and underneath Christ the  
divine I see,  
The dear love of man for his comrade. (125)

Have you thought there could be but a single Supreme?  
There can be any number of Supremes—One does not  
countervail another, any more than one eyesight coun-  
tervails another, or one life countervails another. (291)

It is I who am great, or to be great—it is you up there, or  
any one. (304)

Peter Doyle was one of Whitman's intimates, and these are some of his words about the poet:

"He had pretty vigorous ideas on religion . . . he never went to church—didn't like form, ceremonies—didn't seem to favor preachers at all. I asked him about the hereafter, 'There must be something,' he said. 'There can't be a locomotive unless there is somebody to run it.' I have heard him say that if a person was the right sort of person—and I guess he thought all persons right kind of persons,—he couldn't be destroyed in the next world nor in this."

Mr. Perry tells us that, when on furlough in Brooklyn, Whitman wrote regularly to Peter Doyle. "Sometimes he sent Doyle a 'good long' kiss, 'on the paper here,' like an affectionate child. Often he comforted him, when ill or out of work, with vigorous admonitions" like the following:

As long as the Almighty vouchsafes you health, strength, and a clear conscience, let other things do their worst,—and let Riker go to hell.

Which reminds one of the disciple of Nietzsche, who condensed his precepts for conduct into the words, "So live, that you can look every man in the eye, and tell him to—go to hell!" What Walt Whitman meant by "religion" was an unmoral good nature and self-worship, devoid of righteousness or law:

Know you! solely to drop in the earth the germs of a greater  
Religion,  
The following chants, each for its kind, I sing. (22)

Omnes! Omnes! let others ignore what they may;  
I make the poem of evil also—I commemorate that part also;

I am myself just as much evil as good, and my nation is—  
 And I say there is in fact no evil;  
 (Or if there is, I say it is just as important to you, to the land,  
 or to me, as anything else.) (20)

I too, following many, and follow'd by many, inaugurate a  
 Religion—I descend into the arena;  
 (It may be I am destin'd to utter the loudest cries there, the  
 winner's pealing shouts;  
 Who knows? they may rise from me yet, and soar above every  
 thing.)

Each is not for its own sake;  
 I say the whole earth, and all the stars in the sky, are for  
 Religion's sake.

I say no man has ever yet been half devout enough;  
 None has ever yet adored or worship'd half enough;  
 None has begun to think how divine he himself is, and how  
 certain the future is.

I say that the real and permanent grandeur of These States  
 must be their Religion;  
 Otherwise there is no real and permanent grandeur,  
 (Nor character, nor life worthy the name, without Religion;  
 Nor land, nor man or woman, without Religion.) (21)

Swiftly arose and spread around me the peace and knowledge  
 that pass all the argument of the earth;  
 And I know that the hand of God is the promise of my own.  
 And I know that the spirit of God is the brother of my own;  
 And that all the men ever born are also my brothers, and the  
 women my sisters and lovers;  
 And that a kelson of the creation is love. (35)

The poet does not hesitate to compare himself with  
 the great religious leaders of the past. Christ is men-  
 tioned casually, in company with the mythical Hercu-  
 les, Hermes, and Bacchus. Whitman even ventures to

claim affectionate brotherhood with our Lord, in his work and his spirit:

I see Christ once more eating the bread of his last supper,  
in the midst of youths and old persons;  
I see where the strong divine young man, the Hercules, toil'd  
faithfully and long, and then died. (144)

TO HIM THAT WAS CRUCIFIED

My spirit to yours, dear brother;  
Do not mind because many, sounding your name, do not  
understand you;  
I do not sound your name, but I understand you, (there are  
others also;)  
I specify you with joy, O my comrade, to salute you, and to  
salute those who are with you, before and since—and  
those to come also,  
That we all labor together, transmitting the same charge and  
succession. (116)

In "Democratic Vistas" the poet who is to come follows a host of vanished powers, among whom he sees "Christ, with bent head, brooding love and peace, like a dove." But Whitman himself at last emerges as the true Poet, who fills all things. In his unbounded egotism he identifies the universe, and the whole process of evolution, with himself, and, without a thought of his finiteness and sin, aspires to take the place of God:

With laugh, and many a kiss,  
(Let others deprecate—let others weep for sin, remorse,  
humiliation;)  
O soul, thou pleasest me—I thee.

. . . . .

O Thou transcendant!  
Nameless—the fibre and the breath! (352)

How should I think—how breathe a single breath—how  
speak—if, out of myself,  
I could not launch, to those, superior universes?

Swiftly I shrivel at the thought of God,  
At Nature and its wonders, Time and Space and Death,  
But that I, turning, call to thee, O soul, thou actual Me,  
And lo! thou gently masterest the orbs,  
Thou matest Time, smilest content at Death,  
And fillest, swellest full, the vastnesses of Space. (353)

Finally shall come the Poet, worthy that name;  
The true Son of God shall come, singing his songs. (349)

Nature and Man shall be disjoin'd and diffused no more;  
The true Son of God shall absolutely fuse them. (350)

“Chanting the Square Deific” is a poem after the model of Emerson’s “Brahma.” It might possibly be interpreted as an adoption for poetical purposes of an Oriental and pantheistic philosophy. But it is more than this. Whitman made this philosophy the guide and excuse for his practical life. He not only identified himself with the All, but he regarded the All as expressing himself. It was a Brahminical self-deification, which held all nature, all history, all religions, as the outcome of the one life that throbb’d in his veins and clamored for manifestation in himself. But for the philosophic garb that clothes it, and for the poetic halo that surrounds it, we might call it blasphemous. We must not determine the degree to which moral perversity may unconsciously reach. Let me only quote the significant lines of this poem which makes Jehovah, Christ, Satan, and the Holy Spirit, equally with Brahma, Saturn, Hermes, and Hercules.



to be mere transient effluences from the poet's changeless side :

Chanting the square deific, out of the One advancing, out of  
the sides;

Out of the old and new—out of the square entirely divine,  
Solid, four-sided, (all the sides needed) . . . from this side

JEHOVAH am I,

Old Brahm I, and I Saturnius am.

. . . . .

Consolator most mild, the promis'd one advancing,

With gentle hand extended—the mightier God am I,

Foretold by prophets and poets, in their most rapt prophecies  
and poems;

From this side, lo! the Lord CHRIST gazes—lo! Hermes I—  
lo! mine is Hercules' face. (392, 393)

. . . . .

For I am affection—I am the cheer-bringing God, with hope,  
and all-enclosing Charity;

. . . . .

But my Charity has no death—my Wisdom dies not, neither  
early nor late,

And my sweet Love, bequeath'd here and elsewhere, never  
dies.

. . . . .

Defiant, I, SATAN, still live—still utter words—in new lands  
newly appearing, (and old ones also;)

Permanent here, from my side, warlike, equal with any, real  
as any,

Nor time, nor change, shall ever change me or my words.

Santa SPIRITA, breather, life,

Beyond the light, lighter than light,

Beyond the flames of hell—joyous, leaping easily above hell;

Beyond Paradise—perfumed solely with mine own perfume;

Including all life upon earth—touching, including God—

including Saviour and Satan;

Ethereal, pervading all, (for without me, what were all? what  
were God?) (393, 394)

It is difficult to determine, and still more difficult to describe, the views of Whitman with regard to a future life. They probably varied with his moods of feeling, and became more definite and hopeful toward the close of his career. As the life of the body grew feeble, the desire for a larger and freer existence grew stronger. What hope he had seems to have been derived from his evolutionary philosophy, together with an unconscious appropriation of the Christian idea of progress toward the good, which that philosophy was unable to supply:

Now that he has gone hence, can it be that Thomas Carlyle, soon to chemically dissolve in ashes and by winds, remains an identity still? . . . Does he yet exist, a definite, vital being, . . . an individual? . . . I have no doubt of it. . . . When depress'd by some specially sad event, or tearing problem, I wait till I go out under the stars for the last voiceless satisfaction.

In this broad Earth of ours,  
Amid the measureless grossness and the slag,  
Enclosed and safe within its central heart,  
Nestles the seed Perfection. (466)

What do you think has become of the young and old men?  
And what do you think has become of the women and children?

They are alive and well somewhere;  
The smallest sprout shows there is really no death;  
And if ever there was, it led forward life, and does not wait  
at the end to arrest it,  
And ceas'd the moment life appear'd. (36)

I believe of all those billions of men and women . . . every one exists this hour, here or elsewhere, invisible to us, in exact proportion to what he or she grew from in life, and out of what he or she did, felt, became, loved, sinn'd, in life. (319)

For what is the present, after all, but a growth out of the past?

(As a projectile, form'd, impell'd, passing a certain line,  
still keeps on,  
So the present, utterly form'd, impell'd by the past.) (346)

Are Souls drown'd and destroy'd so?  
Is only matter triumphant? (355)

The dirge and desolation of mankind. (356)

I hear the overweening, mocking voice,  
*Matter is conqueror—matter, triumphant only,*  
*continues onward.*

. . . . .  
*Tell me my destination!* (397)

I understand your anguish, but I cannot help you.

Quicksand years that whirl me I know not whither. (398)

. . . the threat of what is call'd hell is little or nothing to me;  
And the lure of what is called heaven is little or nothing to me;

. . . Dear camerado! I confess I have urged you onward with me, and still urge you, without the least idea what is our destination,

Or whether we shall be victorious, or utterly quell'd and defeated. (181)

Here is only the instinct of immortality, vague and dim, without the certainty afforded by a positive revelation. Evolution has its unpromising aspect for the soul inclined to evil. If the future is only a natural growth out of the past, there is no remedy for sin, and no prospect other than a reproduction of man's present iniquity and misery. For this reason the poet's verse vibrates between a dreadful recognition

of unchanging abnormality, and an irrational ecstasy of hope:

I say distinctly I comprehend no better sphere than this  
earth,  
I comprehend no better life than the life of my body. (414)

I do not know what you are for, . .  
But I will search carefully for it. (327)

That you are here—that life exists, and identity;  
That the powerful play goes on, and you will contribute a  
verse. (324)

With that sad, incessant refrain: *Wherefore, unsatisfied Soul?*  
and *Whither, O mocking Life?* (349)

Behold a secret silent loathing and despair.

. . . . .

Smartly attired, countenance smiling, form upright, death  
under the breast-bones, hell under the skull-bones. (178)

Not one word or deed—not venereal sore, discoloration,  
privacy of the onanist, putridity of gluttons or rum-  
drinkers, speculation, cunning, betrayal, murder, seduction,  
prostitution, but has results beyond death, as really as  
before death. (286)

Yet Whitman cherishes an inextinguishable hope.  
He appropriates the results of Christianity, without ful-  
filling its conditions:

I swear I think there is nothing but immortality! (392)  
My rendezvous is appointed—it is certain;  
The Lord will be there, and wait till I come, on perfect terms;  
(The great Camerado, the lover true for whom I pine, will be  
there.) (86)

I know I am deathless;  
 I know this orbit of mine cannot be swept by the carpenter's  
 compass;  
 I know I shall not pass like a child's carlacue cut with a burnt  
 stick at night. (50)

Now ending well in death the splendid fever of thy deed,

. . . . .

Thou yieldest up thyself. (488)

O my brave soul!  
 O farther, farther sail!  
 O daring joy, but safe! Are they not all the seas of God!  
 O farther, farther, farther sail! (354)

" Passage to India " was published in 1870. It expresses Whitman's later longings for the brotherhood of man. The first voyage of Columbus is made the symbol of that venture of the spirit which heralds and precedes every advance into the future of the individual and of the race. Of this collection of his poems he said :

There's more of me, the essential, ultimate me, in that than in any of the poems. . . The burden of it is evolution—the one thing escaping the other—the unfolding of cosmic purposes.

Passage to India!

Lo, soul! seest thou not God's purpose from the first?  
 The earth to be spann'd, connected by net-work,  
 The people to become brothers and sisters,  
 The races, neighbors, to marry and be given in marriage,  
 The oceans to be cross'd, the distant brought near,  
 The lands to be welded together. (347)

O glad, exulting, culminating song!  
 A vigor more than earth's is in thy notes!  
 Marches of victory—man disenthral'd—the conqueror at  
 last! (458)

Roaming in thought over the Universe, I saw the little that is  
Good steadily hastening towards immortality,  
And the vast all that is call'd Evil I saw hastening to merge  
itself and become lost and dead. (482)

Ah Genoese, thy dream! thy dream!  
Centuries after thou art laid in thy grave,  
The shore thou foundest verifies thy dream. (348)

Have we not grovell'd here long enough, eating and drinking  
like mere brutes?  
Have we not darken'd and dazed ourselves with books long  
enough? (354)

For presently, O soldiers, we too camp in our place in the  
bivouac-camps of green;  
But we need not provide for outposts, nor word for the  
countersign,  
Nor drummer to beat the morning drum. (365)

This is thy hour O Soul, thy free flight into the wordless,  
Away from books, away from art, the day erased, the lesson  
done,  
Thee fully forth emerging, silent, gazing, pondering the  
themes thou lovest best.  
Night, sleep, and the stars. (489)

I find in all Whitman's verses only one poem which indicates that he had grasped the idea of a righteous God and of a righteous administration of the universe. To him law and penalty are non-existent; justice and judgment are not the foundations of God's throne. Only one poem intimates that the thought of condemnation and retribution had ever impressed him, and even this poem makes death, and not a suffering and redeeming God, to be the source of pardon. That poem is entitled "The Singer in the Prison." It shows that the poet had powers of versification which

it surely would have profited him more commonly to use :

*O sight of shame, and pain, and dole!*  
*O fearful thought—a convict Soul!*

. . . . .

A soul, confined by bars and bands,  
Cries, Help! O help! and wrings her hands;  
Blinded her eyes—bleeding her breast,  
Nor pardon finds, nor balm of rest.

. . . . .

It was not I that sinn'd the sin,  
The ruthless Body dragg'd me in;  
Though long I strove courageously,  
The Body was too much for me.

. . . . .

(Dear prison'd Soul, bear up a space,  
For soon or late the certain grace;  
To set thee free, and bear thee home,  
The Heavenly Pardoner, Death, shall come.

*Convict no more—nor shame, nor dole!*  
*Depart! a God-enfranchis'd Soul!* (420-422)

Walt Whitman's doctrine of the future is summed up in his own words, especially in the poem entitled "The Mystic Trumpeter," and in his "Song of the Universal":

I do not think Life provides for all, and for Time and Space—  
but I believe Heavenly Death provides for all. (397)

O I see now that life cannot exhibit all to me—as the day  
cannot,  
I see that I am to wait for what will be exhibited by  
death. (436)

Nothing ever has been, or ever can be, charged against me,  
 half as bad as the evil I really am.  
 I charge that there be no theory or school founded out of me;  
 I charge you to leave all free, as I have left all free. (427)

I absolve you from all except yourself, spiritual, bodily—  
 that is eternal—you yourself will surely escape;  
 The corpse you will leave will be but excrementitious. (440)

Hymns to the universal God, from universal Man—all joy!  
 A reborn race appears—a perfect World, all joy!  
 Women and Men, in wisdom, innocence and health—all joy!  
 Riotous, laughing bacchanals, fill'd with joy! (458)

For it, the partial to the permanent flowing,  
 For it, the Real to the Ideal tends.

For it, the mystic evolution;  
 Not the right only justified—what we call evil also justified.

From imperfection's murkiest cloud,  
 Darts always forth one ray of perfect light,  
 One flash of Heaven's glory. (466, 467)

Give me, O God, to sing that thought!  
 Give me—give him or her I love, that quenchless faith  
 In Thy ensemble. Whatever else withheld, withhold not from  
 us,  
 Belief in plan of Thee enclosed in Time and Space;  
 Health, peace, salvation universal.

Is it a dream?  
 Nay, but the lack of it the dream,  
 And, failing it, love's lore and wealth a dream,  
 And all the world a dream. (468)

Was Walt Whitman a poet? Yes, a poet in the  
 lower realms of poetry. He had poetry in solution,  
 which needed the touch of creative imagination to  
 crystallize into pleasing form; he had the golden ore,



but it was so mixed with quartz and slag as to seem rough and uncouth; he had flashes of insight, but his sky was generally cloudy and of uncertain promise. His poetry lacked in substance as well as in form. He had no hold upon the truth of things that enabled him to organize his material. Arbitrary in form as in substance, he apotheosized the body, and every impulse of the body was represented in the irregularity and lawlessness of his verse. Whitman sought liberty without law; but, because he ignored Christ, he lost both law and liberty. His fundamental error was his choice of an impersonal and non-moral, in place of a personal and moral God. Self-willed and pleasure-loving, he "refused to have God in his knowledge," and "God gave him up to a reprobate mind." He lost all sense of righteousness in God or man. The love which he celebrated was love without moral distinctions, love for what *is*, rather than for what *ought to be*, love for nastiness as well as for purity, for wickedness as well as for goodness, for the wrong as well as for the right. We search his work from end to end, but find no recognition of any Being who cares for the right or who will vindicate it. The universe has no heart that can feel, and no will that can control; all things are equally phases of its manifestation; there is no security for progress; the only power is man himself. Man is a creature of evil impulses as well as of good, and the evil are often supreme. But yielding to the evil is not sin, for the yielding is only a product of man's nature, and that nature is primarily physical, and so, destitute of conscience or will. Since there is no guilt, there can be no atonement and no

redemption. Christ is only one of many good examples of heroic suffering, and the poet can complacently put himself by Christ's side. What hope has he for the future? Only a vague instinct that yearns for another and a better life, side by side with a conscience that witnesses against him, and protests that all right to such a life has been forfeited by his sin. "Without God and without hope" is the verdict of reason. It is the natural and necessary outcome of a godless philosophy and a godless life, the demonstration of the moral depths to which poetry can descend when liberty is divorced from law.

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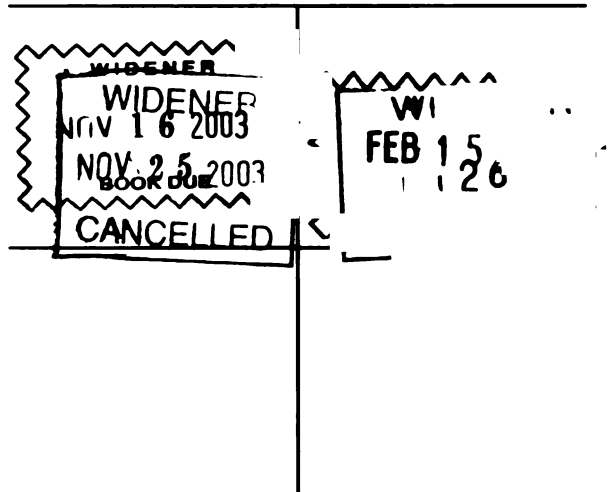




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